



*Women, Land and Legacy*<sup>sm</sup>  
Results from the Listening Sessions



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# Women, Land, and Legacy<sup>sm</sup>: Results from the Listening Sessions

## Authors

Corry Bregendahl  
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development  
corry@iastate.edu

Carol R. Smith  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
rjcrsmit@netins.net

Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
tanya.meyer@ia.usda.gov

Beth Grabau  
Farm Service Agency  
beth.grabau@ia.usda.gov

Cornelia Flora  
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development  
cflora@iastate.edu

## Organizational Partners and Contributors

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Farm Service Agency  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
North Central Regional Center for Rural Development  
National Agricultural Statistics Service  
Women, Food, and Agriculture Network  
Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa  
Risk Management Agency

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North Central Regional Center for Rural Development  
Iowa State University  
107 Curtiss Hall  
Ames, IA 50011-1050  
(515) 294-8321, (515) 294-3180 fax  
<http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu>



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The purpose of Women, Land, and Legacy<sup>sm</sup> is to provide Iowa's farm women a risk management tool that brings them together at the local level to empower them to act on their landscapes and within their communities. There are two important steps in the WLL<sup>sm</sup> process: the first is to listen and learn from Iowa's women farmland owners about their vision and goals for the land in facilitated listening sessions. The second is to use this information to create opportunities through workshops and projects that a) are in accordance with women's values, b) address topics local women identify as important and c) address topics in ways that improve women's abilities to make good decisions about their land.

This report is a summary of ways in which Iowa's women landowners frame agriculture and their place within it as articulated through the participation of 806 women representing 22 of Iowa's 99 counties in the WLL<sup>sm</sup> listening sessions. The analysis is based on content analysis of women's input recorded at each session. These sessions enrich our understanding of women's relationships to the land and how these women navigate the social landscape to manage their land in ways true to their values. The following are key highlights:

- Women view the family-owned farm as an expression of financial, political, and cultural independence and resistance.
- Women want freedom from outside control (such as corporate control, market prices, outside investors, etc.).
- Women support diversification in agriculture as a means to protect their independence.
- Women view knowledge and learning as a way to achieve independence.
- Women support agricultural diversification to improve self-reliance.
- Women understand they have assets and want to use them to become empowered.
- Women recognize political involvement as a way to change policy but have difficulty gaining access via structures and environments in which they traditionally do not function.
- Women value decentralized agriculture through their support for new farmers, young farmers, and many farmers for a "smaller, diverse agriculture."
- Women in the listening sessions articulate a strong connection to community.
- Women cite the quality, beauty and essence of rural life as the positive core of their communities.
- Women say farm life embodies a set of unique values which serve as the foundation for meaningful social interaction.
- Women recognize the role of farming communities in shaping public perceptions about food and public health.
- Women exhibit a clear and strong consciousness about land health issues and respect nature intrinsically—not for its productive value, but because it sustains all life.
- Women frequently reference spirituality and religiosity through their connection with the land that transcends its productive value.

- Women favor implementing conservation practices today to ensure the land can sustain future generations of tomorrow.
- Women value the land because it provides them with a quality family life.
- Women maintain relationships with others who can help them make informed decisions about their farm operations.
- Women landowners say they are not always treated fairly and with respect.
- Women attribute health and healing benefits to their relationship with the land.
- Confidence and self-esteem are closely tied to women's knowledge contributions to the farm, as well as their health and labor assets.
- Women are concerned with the drain of human resources away from their rural communities.
- Women farmland owners overwhelmingly support policies, programs, and initiatives that encourage new farmers and young families to occupy the land and farm in their communities.
- Women credit farming and land ownership as the foundation for family values, morality, a good work ethic, and a healthy place to raise children.
- Women view themselves as active protectors of both family and the land: protecting one necessarily translates into protecting the other as they are symbiotic.
- Women support policies that provide incentives for better farm conservation practices, protect air and water quality by regulating and monitoring feedlots and confinement manure pits, and control urban sprawl and restrict housing developments on farmland.
- Women use kinship and friendship networks to help them make decisions about for their land and agriculture
- Women also consult a variety of both public and private sector resources to help them make decisions such as the NRCS, FSA, ISU Extension, community college personnel, law and financial experts, the Farm Bureau, experienced producers, elders, feed co-ops, agronomists, land tenants, and local business owners.
- Women landowners view financial capital as a means to a goal, not an end in itself. That is, women landowners are concerned for and acting not only on behalf of their current personal financial situation but also their *future* financial situation for their immediate and extended family.
- Women say land ownership solidifies and stabilizes business relationships women have with lenders, which makes farm management and decision making easier.

When we analyzed the data another way by comparing women's assets to needs, we found that women are twice as likely to report having assets rather than needs when it comes to characterizing their relationship to the land. At the same time, they note room for improvement. These findings have implications for the disconnect some women report when they seek information or assistance from farm service providers who may view them as "needing" rather than "having" something to contribute (be it a strong sense of identity, ties to family and community, knowledge, or other resources).



Data from women in the WLL<sup>sm</sup> project also support the proposition that there is a “gendered location” within agriculture. Women see themselves situated differently or at least differently than the current, dominant, “conventional” paradigm would suggest. For example, women associate independence (often linked to more traditional, paternalistic attitudes) not with individualism but with *independent communities* and therefore reject industrialized agriculture.

Women also see themselves as the locus of connections to family, community and nature. They view themselves as central connectors between the past, present, and future. It is therefore not surprising that many women in the listening sessions think in terms of long-term promises and prospects as a deliberate strategy to protect their land, families, and communities. These and other factors described in this report result in gendered thinking and planning patterns that are consistently more complex than many management tools, agency staff advice, and programs presently realize and accommodate, providing rich opportunities for change.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

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Although much is known about farmland *operators* in the US largely due to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service's Census of Agriculture conducted every five years, very little is known about actual farmland *owners*. For Iowa and many other states, this may be problematic in terms of understanding the role farmland owners play in making decisions about the land they own.

In 2002, Mike Duffy and Darnell Smith conducted a study of farmland ownership and tenure in Iowa, the results of which are detailed in a 2004 report titled *Farmland Ownership and Tenure in Iowa 1982-2002: A Twenty Year Perspective*. Based on a random sample that included all parcels of agricultural land owned in Iowa, they found that 47 percent of land in Iowa was owned or co-owned by women in 2002 and women owned or co-owned 54 percent of leased farmland. With such a significant share of farmland ownership controlled (or co-controlled) by women, many people wondered what the implications were for Iowa's farmland. Farmland owners who operate their own farms play a key role impacting land health by making management decisions that directly affect the land. Yet farmland owners who are not operators themselves also play a key role by making decisions about who will farm their land and how it will be farmed.

### The Precursor to WLL<sup>sm</sup>

By 2002, efforts were underway to address the role of women landowners in Iowa agriculture. The Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN) in collaboration with Iowa State University conducted a survey of women farmland owners in Cass County, Iowa. Other project partners included an advisory committee of Cass County women farmland owners, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). The goal of the survey was to gather information to strengthen farm outreach programs directed towards women. The survey was funded by a seed grant from the Ben and Jerry's Foundation, with additional support from the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, ISU, NRCS, and FSA.

The survey was mailed to 675 Cass County women farmland owners and co-owners identified by the FSA. 276 surveys were returned for a response rate of 40 percent. Findings from the survey showed that the majority of women farmland owners (59%) co-own their land—usually with other family members. Results also showed that women overwhelmingly indicate a desire to keep their land in the family and in farming, yet many cited barriers such as unfavorable economic conditions that might impede that goal (Wells, Phillips, and Neuman, 2004). Noteworthy, however, is women's concern for the environment which ranked slightly higher than the need for income as it relates to women's needs and values that influence decision making. The study concluded with recommendations for creating a space in which women farmland owners can voice their concerns, share their ideas, and get information about farm programs.

## Organizational Contributors

At the same time, the Iowa USDA State Outreach Council (SOC) was exploring options to better serve women farmland owners; the SOC authorized a committee to address this issue. The SOC in Iowa is comprised of USDA agency directors and outreach personnel as well as other state, local, and non profit organizations interested in rural issues. Because of the diverse membership of the SOC, organizations like WFAN, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), and Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa (EMI) became involved in this issue and helped secure funding from Risk Management Education to support their efforts to examine the role of women landowners (and aspiring landowners) in Iowa's agriculture. The project was called Women, Land and Legacy (WLL<sup>sm</sup>). In 2006, organizational changes affected the composition of the WLL<sup>sm</sup> State Team, which currently consists of NRCS, FSA, NCRLC and the USDA-funded North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD).

## Project Goals and Design

The goal of WLL<sup>sm</sup> is to provide an emerging risk management tool for Iowa farm women that brings them together at the local level to empower them to act on their landscapes and in their communities. Desired outcomes include the formation of local and regional networks of women to provide resources, information, and education to assist with risk management, which leads to visible changes on the landscapes and communities as a result of participation.

The project design adheres to the following primary principles:

1. It is led by a local team from one or a cluster of counties. Each team is anchored by local NRCS, Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), FSA, and ISU Extension and includes other community representatives and local agricultural women. The project assists the local team plan a Level I "listening session."
2. The Level I listening session is based on dialogue with specific questions in small groups, followed by focused conversation in the larger group to refine information about:
  - How women are connected to the land,
  - What their dreams and visions for their land are,
  - What helps them when they have decisions to make about their land,
  - What information they need to make those decisions, and
  - How they want to receive that information.
3. Information from the Level I listening session is compiled and reviewed by the local team, which can then begin to plan a series of Level II "learning sessions" where women are linked to information sources and people who can help them make decisions about their land in accordance with priorities the women identified in Level I listening sessions.

## Interpreting the Results

In January, 2004, a pilot listening session event was held at the annual Practical Farmers of Iowa Conference to test the process. Eleven women from across the state participated. Later that same year, five counties from each quadrant of the state and one from central Iowa were invited to participate. Before these events had concluded, other counties throughout the state were asking to participate in the program. By the end of 2006, almost a quarter of Iowa's counties held a Level I listening session and more than 800 women attended a WLL<sup>sm</sup> Level I event in their home county or nearby. About half of those have also held level two meetings. By the end of 2007, we estimate that at least half of Iowa's 99 counties will have held WLL<sup>sm</sup> events.

Like any other research project, poll, or information-gathering campaign, we must assess the extent to which the information we collected in the course of the project is representative of women farmland owners across Iowa. Sampling methods determine the target population (in this case, women farmland owners, farmers, and sometimes aspiring farmers). Methods of inclusion ensure that a representative portion of that population participates. There are many sampling methods available, such as random sampling (where each individual has an equal probability of being selected for participation), convenience sampling (where participants are selected because it is convenient for research), or purposive sampling (where researchers purposely select certain individuals from the population). In all cases, individuals can choose not to participate, meaning that non-response error is introduced.

The aim of WLL<sup>sm</sup> was to issue an open invitation to farmland owners, operators, and aspiring farmers, with a particular focus on women, to attend listening sessions at a public location. Women farmland owners were identified through the FSA and received invitations by mail. Others were invited to attend through public press releases and posters. Participants self-selected whether they chose to attend, like people choosing to respond to a survey. To ensure that various groups of women were not excluded because of the time of day when the listening sessions were held, several local teams held two different listening sessions on the same day—one during the day and one at night—to accommodate different preferences and/or different work and domestic obligations. Meetings lasted between two and three hours and were scheduled around the growing season. Participants needed access to transportation in order to attend. We did not expect transportation to be a participation barrier for this group of women, although absentee landowners—particularly those living in other states—clearly were at a disadvantage. The results in this report therefore represent women farmland owners and operators most of whom live in Iowa (although a few women from neighboring states did attend). Thus, we can conclude that the results in this report more likely represent the dreams and goals of resident women farmland owners who comprise an estimated 67 to 80 percent of Iowa's women farmland owners and co-owners.<sup>1</sup> We expect this to influence the results by suggesting a somewhat stronger sense of

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<sup>1</sup> This is the closest reasonable estimate we can provide, derived from the Cass County study (2004). That study found that two-thirds of women landowners visit their land either daily or "frequently" and 19 percent "live a considerable distance from the land."

identity and connection to the land and farming communities than exists among the population of women landowners as a whole, based on the premise that we expect resident women farmland owners to have stronger ties to the land and their communities than nonresident owners.

## **LISTENING SESSION RESULTS**

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This report is a summary and discussion of data collected from the 806 women who participated in locally led listening sessions through December 31, 2006 of the Women, Land and Legacy<sup>sm</sup> project. These women attended a total of 15 listening sessions and own land or live in 22 of Iowa's 99 counties including Cerro Gordo, Clark, Clay, Clayton, Emmet, Fremont, Hancock, Howard, Jones, Kossuth, Lyon, Lucas, Marshall, Mills, Mitchell, Montgomery, Page, Palo Alto, Wapello, Warren, Winneshiek, and Wright counties.

Data analysis of the listening sessions was conducted by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) in consultation with the WLL<sup>sm</sup> State Team. When analysis was completed, NCRCRD submitted a draft report to listening session facilitators from the WLL<sup>sm</sup> State Team for review. Facilitators provided feedback in the form of observations and comments based on their interaction with farm women, who often informally shared with them personal experiences that did not appear in women's group responses to the listening sessions. NCRCRD incorporated these observations into the analysis (and appropriately noted them in the text) because of the participatory nature of this action research project. Facilitators' impressions and reflections enrich our understanding of women's relationship to the land and how these women navigate the social landscape to manage their land in ways true to their values.

Data were coded according to two separate, analytical frameworks using Nvivo qualitative software. The first is the Community Capitals Framework based on the work of Flora, Flora and Fey (2005). The second is the Gendered Elements of the Alternative Agriculture Paradigm, based on the work of Beus and Dunlap (1990) and Chiappe and Flora (1998). Nvivo is useful for coding and detecting patterns in qualitative data and is critical for quantifying text-based information.

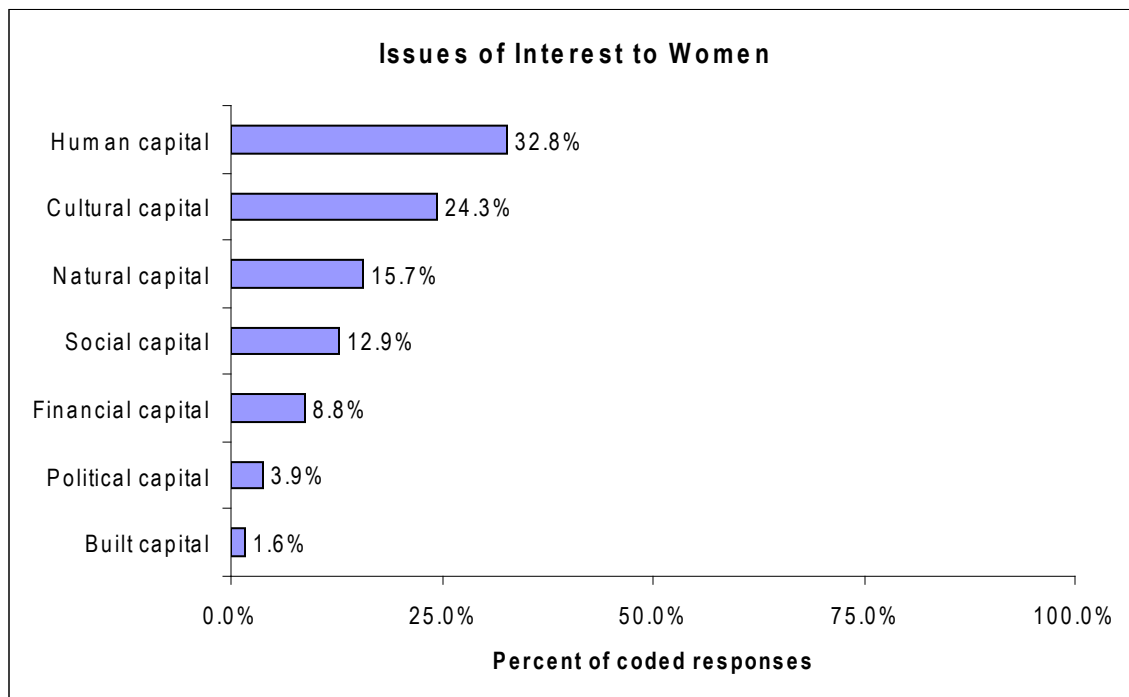
### **Understanding Assets and Opportunities for Iowa's Women Landowners: The Community Capitals Framework**

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is ideal for understanding ways in which Iowa's women landowners frame agriculture and their place within it. This section summarizes and discusses the data according to those categories, each representing one kind of "community capital." They include natural, cultural, human, social, political, built, and financial capital.

Natural capital is inherent to a particular place and includes land, air, water, soil, scenery, and biodiversity. Cultural capital includes the set of values, customs, and traditions that define what we believe to be important (Flora et al, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is often tightly bound to the historical use of and regard for natural resources, which is critical for understanding the constellation of socially produced values, attitudes, and relationships that exist when people interact with each other in a

unique environmental context. Human capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, abilities, self-esteem and health of individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital includes the networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity that inhere in the relationships people have with each other (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital is often strong in like-minded groups such as family and friends, whereas bridging social capital represents ties and trust between groups that are markedly different in terms of their purpose and philosophy. Political capital refers to the ability of groups and individuals to influence the distribution of resources, which is achieved through their ability to be heard and by capitalizing on their ties to elected officials (Flora et al., 2004; Aigner, Flora, and Hernandez, 2001). Built capital refers to human-made infrastructure such as transportation networks, telecommunications, buildings, water systems, and more (Flora et al., 2004). Built capital requires investments of financial capital, which includes money, debt capital, tax breaks, and any other source of currency that can be used for investment (Lorenz, 1999).

We coded a total of 3110 references or “passages” of data using the Community Capitals Framework. Figure 1 shows the extent to which women regard their relationship to the land and farming and what they want and need to know to manage their land in terms of the community capitals framework.



**Figure 1. Issues of interest to women based on the community capitals framework**

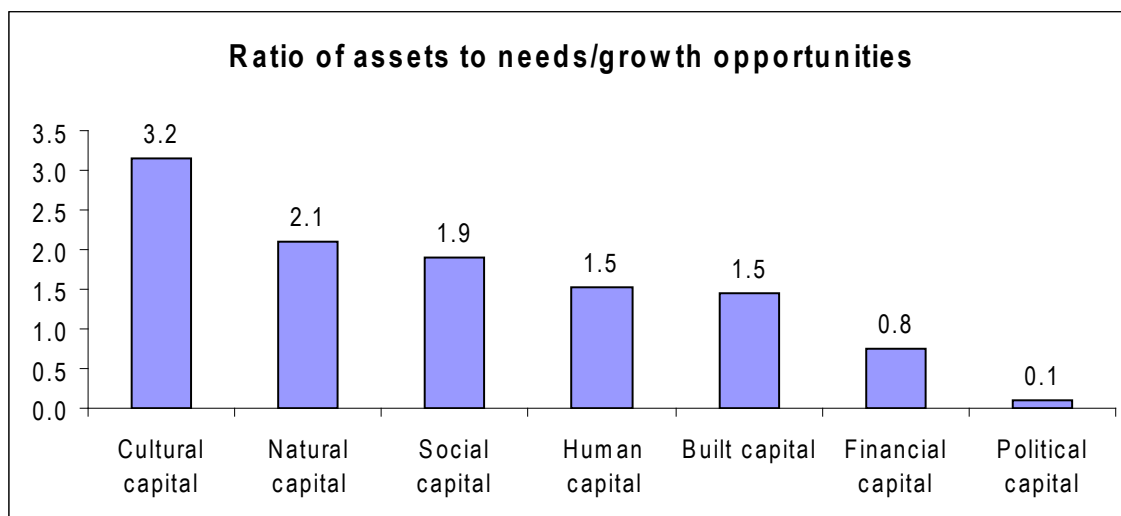
Using the CCF for content analysis, we can conclude that issues of most importance or interest to women landowners relate to human capital (knowledge, skills, health, and self-esteem) and socially produced values (cultural capital), followed by the concern for the environment, social relationships, and financial security. Women were least interested in issues related to political involvement and infrastructure, which comprised a total 5.5% of responses.



Human capital issues dominate women’s interests (comprising 32.8% of responses) followed by cultural capital (24.3%). Natural capital and social capital are also of interest to women. Financial issues are of interest to a lesser extent, comprising 8.8 percent of responses whereas political and built capital trailed far behind with 3.9%, and 1.6% of responses, respectively.

Beyond identifying the capitals and their role in community development, the CCF also focuses on assets instead of deficits, emphasizing the interaction among these seven capitals and how they build upon one another to lead to positive change. In this regard, the CCF offers a way to analyze community development efforts from a systems perspective by identifying the assets in each capital (stock), the types of capital invested (flow), the interaction among the capitals, and the resulting impacts across capitals (Emery and Flora, 2006). We used the CCF in this project to tap the perceptions of women landowners in Iowa regarding their assets in each of the capital and where they see opportunities for further growth in each.

After coding and analyzing the data according to assets and opportunities for growth, we found that 62% of the passages were asset-based and 38% were areas women saw as growth opportunities or needs. Overall, women regard themselves and their position in agriculture favorably in terms of access to resources, while at the same time noting room for improvement. When we compare the extent to which women mention assets versus opportunities for growth by type of community capital (Figure 2), we find that women mention assets more than growth opportunities (indicated where the value of the ratio is greater than 1) in almost all of the capitals, with the exception of financial and political capital. In the case of cultural capital, women mention assets three times more than needs (where the ratio is 3.2 to 1). The ratio of natural and social capital assets is also quite high (around 2 to 1). Moreover, women also view themselves as having more human capital assets than needs. By contrast, the ratio of financial and political capital assets to needs is less than one, meaning there is general agreement that improvement is needed in these areas.



**Figure 2. Ratio of assets to needs or growth opportunities based on the community capitals framework**

These findings have implications for the disconnect some women report when they seek information or assistance from farm service providers who may view them as “needing” rather than “having” something to contribute (be it a strong sense of identity, ties to family and community, knowledge, or other resources). The results also suggest that in order to be effective, it is useful for farm program service providers to be aware of women landowners’ cultural, social, land-based, and knowledge assets and values and be prepared to integrate them into outreach activities.

Another advantage of examining the data in this way is learning how we can use information from women to help focus efforts of farm service providers. Figure 2 shows that women mention more growth opportunities than assets in the areas of financial and political capital. How can farm service agencies and organizations serving women use women’s cultural, natural, social, human, and built capital assets to build their financial and political assets?

## Human Capital

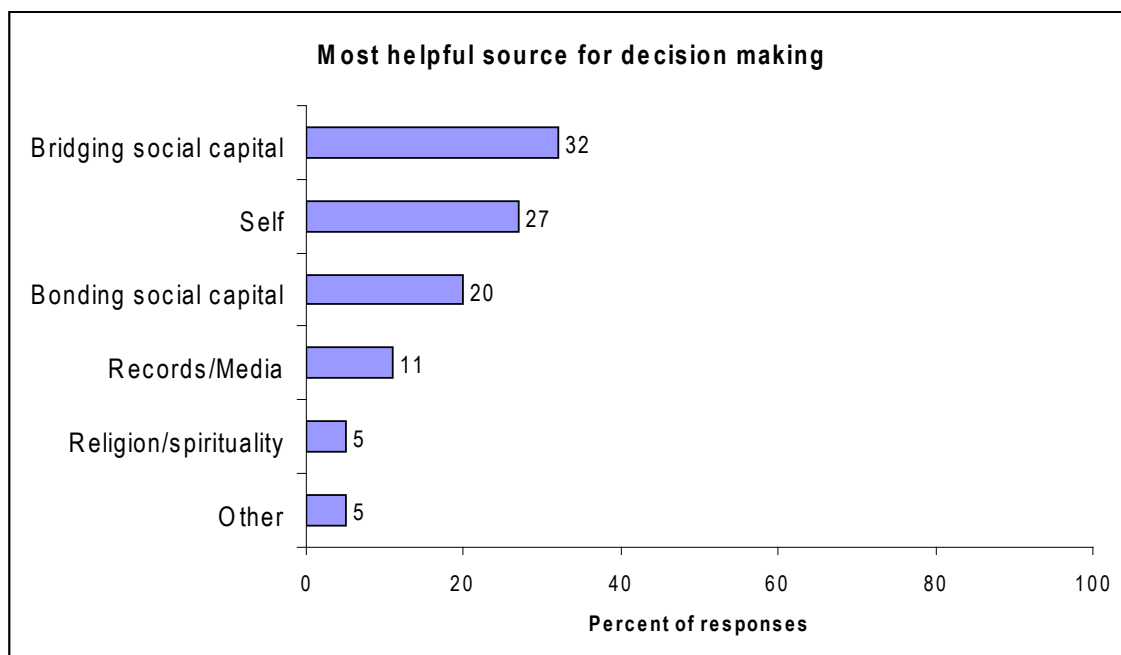
The key components of human capital are health; skills, education, and knowledge (including access to others’ skills, education, and knowledge); and confidence and self-esteem. Human capital was the top category of interest among women landowners (32.8% of responses). As indicated by the assets-to-needs ratio (Figure 2), human capital is also an area where women say they have considerable resources.

In terms of health assets, women said that farm life can be credited for their sense of well-being. Women attributed health benefits to their relationship with the land—both physical and mental. They say it is “healthy” and “healing” for them and helps them “recover.” It also provides women with a “relaxing,” “safe” place. Yet health is also of great concern to women. A small contingent of women reported feeling stress, anger, frustration, and worry when describing their relationship to the land. Some are also concerned about farm-related cancer. “Why is everyone getting more cancer in our area?” Women from several counties want to see research and resources committed to local cancer issues and public education on the risks of chemical use. Women also want information about health risks and farm safety.

In terms of skills, education and knowledge, many women—when asked to use one or two words to describe their relationship or connection to the land and agriculture—listed their labor contributions to the farm. While some listed traditional roles associated with women such as “gardening,” “raising children,” “meals on wheels,” “chore boy,” “go-fer,” “helper,” and “stay-at-home mom,” others listed more unconventional roles such as “tractor driver,” “livestock worker,” “hauler,” “manual labor,” “auger wagon driver,” “truck driver,” “steward of the soil,” and “self-employed.” Women also viewed themselves as an important source of enthusiasm and commitment. In addition, women play active roles in the business side of farming, such as establishing relationships with others who can help them make informed decisions about farm operations.

Human capital assets for women landowners also include their access to other human resources, which complement the skills, education, knowledge, and confidence of women farmland owners. When women were asked, “When you have had decisions to make or dreams that you would like to see happen for your land or agriculture, what has been the most helpful to you?” they cited a variety of resources. Figure 3 shows the most helpful resources broken down into six different categories: Bridging social capital, bonding social capital, self, media, religion/spirituality, and “other.” As described in more detail in the next section, social capital is the “glue” that holds people together. It inheres in the relationships people have with each other. In WLL<sup>sm</sup>, human and social capital are tightly intertwined as demonstrated by women’s reliance on a variety of human resources as important sources of information for decision making. Social capital is the conduit through which information and human capital flows.

Bonding social capital includes relationships with people who are like-minded, such as family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Bridging social capital includes relationships with people, organizations, agencies, and institutions beyond comfortable kinship and friendship circles. Human resources in bridging arrangements often represent experts and professionals who are consulted because of their specialized knowledge rather than for emotional support. For WLL<sup>sm</sup>, this includes lenders, Iowa State University Cooperative Extension, financial and estate advisors, experienced farmers, elders, NRCS, FSA, Farm Bureau, lawyers, accountants, seed dealers, agricultural advisors, landlords, tenants, mentors, sales representatives, co-ops, local community colleges, agronomists, nutritionists, and veterinarians.



**Figure 3. Most helpful sources for making decisions about the land or agriculture**

Figure 3 (page 19) shows that women rely mostly on bridging social capital, or people outside kinship and friendship networks, to help them make decisions about their land (32% of responses), followed by their own knowledge, actions, characteristics, skills, and education included in the category of “self.” Family, friends and neighbors ranked third, constituting 27 percent of responses. Women also rely on records and sources of media for information such as the Internet, TV, books, radio, farm magazines, and newspapers to help them make decisions. Another category that distinguished itself from the others was one relating to religion and spirituality. Women cited faith as a resource for decision making five percent of the time. The “other” category included financial sources and unspecified networks.

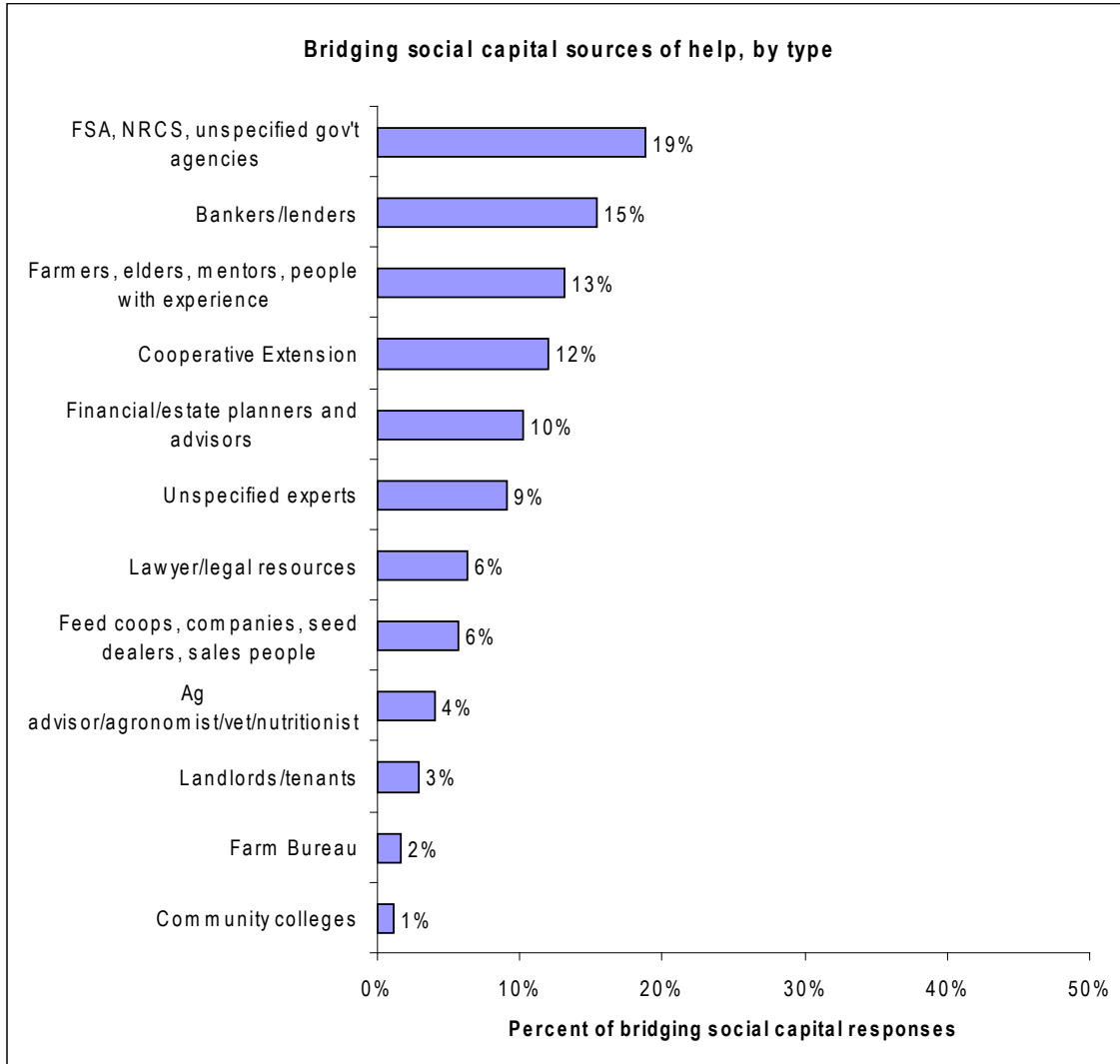
Figure 4 (page 21) clarifies references women made to various sources of bridging social capital, when asked what they considered to be helpful resources for decision making. FSA, NRCS and unspecified government agencies comprised the largest group with 19 percent of responses. Other important sources include lenders; other farmers, elders, mentors, and people with experience (15% of responses), ISU Cooperative Extension (12%) and financial or estate planners (10%). Although not explicitly asked, most of the human resources women cited as helpful are available within their own communities and counties, suggesting that women landowners rely on local assets to help them make decisions about their land.

Figure 5 (page 21) shows more details about the type of bonding social capital resources women cite when helping them make decisions about the land. Family comprises the most responses, at 68 percent, followed by neighbors (19%) and friends (13%).

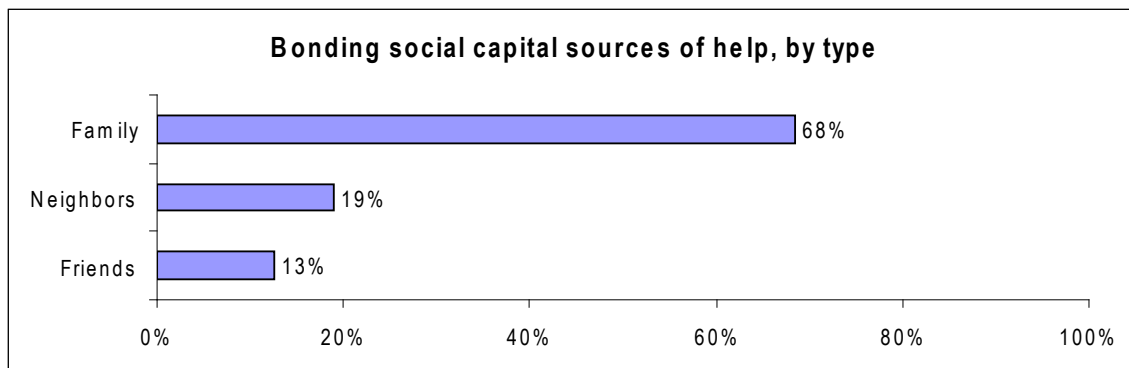
Figure 6 (page 22) shows how much women farmland owners and operators rely on computer technology and the Internet as a source of information to help them make decisions.

Based on these results, outreach campaigns will therefore be wise to consider reaching women through the experts and professionals on whom they rely, as well as their families, and via the Internet.

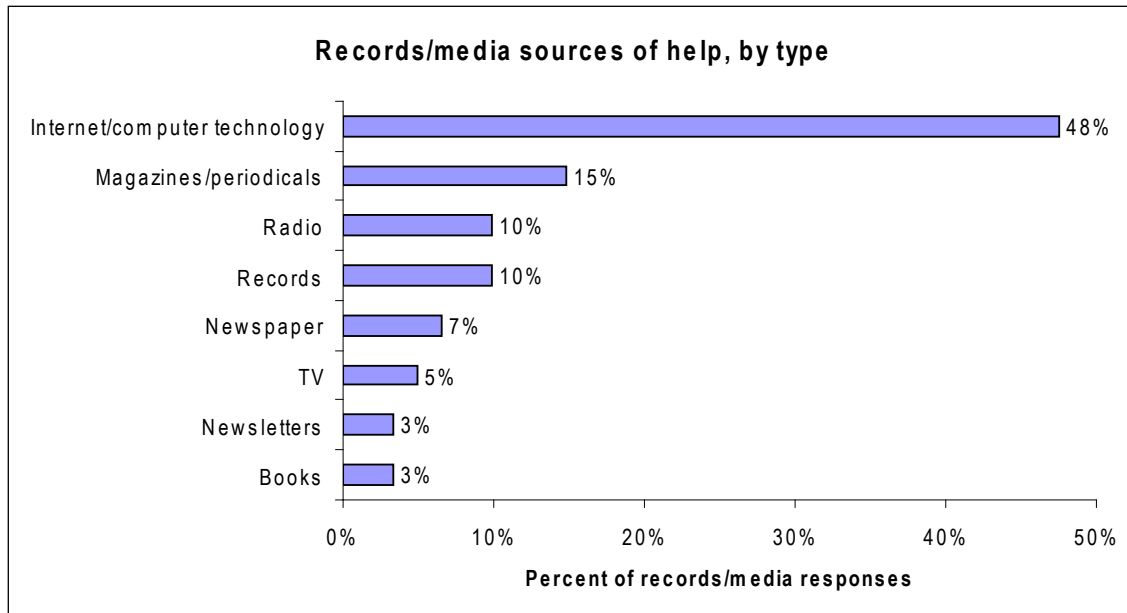
While human resources can act as a resource for women, they can also be a challenge, preventing women from achieving the goals they set for their land. Women landowners say they are not always treated fairly and with respect from many different factions. Facilitators report they consistently hear women say how they have been treated differently than men, relating specific experiences about such treatment. Several widows (at different listening sessions) told stories about how local coops or businesses tried to sell them inferior services or merchandise—until they finally asked the merchant if they would have tried to sell these services and products to their husbands. Women said disrespect came from renters too. One woman said, “Male renters don’t think women can make decisions.” More severe in comparison, members of the state WLL<sup>sm</sup> committee have also fielded calls from women relating instances of outright abuse and harassment over land issues. For that reason, NRCS and FSA now provide a legal rights publication for women as well as state numbers to report abuse in packets they receive.



**Figure 4. Bridging social capital related resources, by type**



**Figure 5. Bonding social capital related resources, by type**



**Figure 6. Records/media sources of help, by type**

While confidence and self-esteem can be linked to respect for women within the farm community, it is also closely tied to women's knowledge contributions to the farm, as well as health and labor assets. Some women landowners derive a great sense of pride from owning land, while others are proud of what the land represents—a sense of accomplishment of what they have invested over the years (e.g., hard work) and what they have achieved (e.g., healthy soils; a happy, healthy life, etc.). As one woman remarked, "recognition of ownership can be positive and empowering—an asset." As such, land can be a source of inner "strength" and "self sufficiency" for women. However, women say they can be "self conscious" and some "don't know what to do," while explicitly acknowledging the need to be "empowered with self confidence." Some women want help with decision making and want outreach to be tailored especially for women (see the section on information women want and how they want it for more details). These women recognize opportunities for improvement in terms of gaining knowledge for self reliance and confidence, particularly when they can do so in an atmosphere that makes learning comfortable. Some women also noted it is important for women to consult only those professionals and experts who are respectful of women farmland owners and operators.

From a less personal, more community-focused perspective, women were concerned with the drain of human capital away from their rural communities. Women farmland owners overwhelmingly support policies, programs, and initiatives that encourage new farmers and young families to occupy the land and farm in their communities. Women landowners will be a critical source of support for such efforts, should they begin to take shape in the near future.

## Cultural Capital

Values are at the core of understanding cultural capital. Values drive what women landowners view as important and how they act in regard to the land. Notably, cultural capital is the second highest ranked topic of interest among women landowners with nearly one-fourth of content (24.3%) attributable to this concept. In addition, women's assets relating to cultural capital were mentioned *three times more* than "needs" or growth opportunities.

What is cultural capital among women landowners? The farm and farming is the bedrock of how women landowners define themselves; it is the source of their identity and their families' identity and an asset for women. Farming is not only what they do, but *who they are*. Farming is their family heritage, home, and history. It is "everything—life, love, and livelihood." It is a source of memories and link to the past but is also a link to the future as they plan for their children to take over the farm and provide for "continuity of generations." Other themes that frequently surfaced relating to cultural capital are the sense of pride land ownership has given women, as well as a sense of independence and freedom. Some women likened farming to a life force—the farm was "in my blood" "in my heart," and "replenishing." Others considered it an integral part of their spirituality, referring to the land as a "blessed," "God's gift," and a source of "wonderment," "virtue," "prayer," "faith," and "spiritual guidance."

Cultural capital includes women's attitudes toward the land. Some women personified the land by assigning it positive human characteristics such as "nurturing." Some women even call it a "friend" or "companion." In their assignation of human qualities to the land, women become inextricably bound to it and relate to it as a fellow human being, according it respect and appreciation people deserve. Land is a "gift," a gift for which women are "thankful" and "responsible" to not only value but care for as good stewards. They frequently remarked on their sense of love, respect, and passion for the land.

Women also credited farming and land ownership as the foundation for family values, morality, a good work ethic, and a healthy place to raise their children. Interestingly, women seem to parallel their relationship with the land to their relationships in the family. Women view themselves as active protectors of both family and the land: Protecting one necessarily translates into protecting the other; the family and the land are symbiotic. Women caring for the land are strategically looking out for themselves and their families, thereby accomplishing their "life's work." Critical for achieving this goal and keeping cultural assets within the family is to pass the farm on to children or other family members who appreciate and perpetuate their values for land.

In terms of growth opportunities, many women felt it is important for the farm to be a "family farm," to be protected against corporate control and ownership. This sentiment was pervasive throughout the listening sessions. Over and over again, women are concerned with "saving the family farm," "stopping corporate farmers," "controlling commercial feedlots," "keeping farmland in the family," and "protecting from outside investment." There was also general consensus that agriculture should be small- and

medium-sized, locally controlled, diverse, and conservation-minded. More specific suggestions for achieving this included instituting laws and government policies that “favor small and family farms” and “ensure inheritance of the family farm” such as “legislation to do away with the death tax.” Another way women suggest protecting the family farm is to simply respect and support the women critical for their operation. Many women suggest a need for “women’s equality,” which many believe requires a culture shift. Several broad suggestions for achieving this included “changing the men’s thinking and attitudes” that would allow women’s voices to be heard first and foremost, and then legitimized.

Women recognize the need for all of society to support women farmland owners and operators as the critical component for saving the family farm. Other aspects for which women farmers cannot control but could benefit from in their quest for keeping farms family owned and operated included a greater public respect and appreciation for the knowledge and skills of the farmer and support for conditions that allow farmers to maintain a high quality of life. Greater local support and appreciation of the role of the farmer, combined with broader efforts to dismantle corporate farming, were proffered as solutions for reaching the dreams and goals of women landowners.

## Natural Capital

Based on the content analysis, women ranked natural capital third among the seven capitals of concern or interest. The proportion of assets to growth opportunities is 2.1, meaning that women view themselves as having more natural capital assets than needs. However, this should not be interpreted as a claim that women are uninterested in improving natural capital. On the contrary, the following discussion summarizing their responses shows that women do have a keen interest in conserving the land and participating in programs that help them help the environment.

For women participating in Women, Land and Legacy, natural capital assets include positive characteristics of the environment. Women identify and appreciate many nature resource based dimensions of land ownership. For these women, land provides:

- A place for women to care for the land through environmental conservation and preservation;
- A place for women to engage in activities that link them to land such as farming and gardening;
- Biodiversity such as wildlife, trees, flowers, crops, and livestock;
- A lifegiving source of fresh air and healthy food to promote physical health and purity;
- A place to withdraw to find nature, peace, refuge, solitude and privacy (promoting better mental health);
- A place to provoke the senses (especially the sense of sight and smell);
- A place to link to the past by restoring the land to native vegetation;
- An opportunity to express sustainable or organic values;
- A site for recreational enjoyment of open spaces and the great outdoors; and
- Homeland security—insurance they’ll have a place to grow the basics of survival “if everything goes to hell.”



Women also want further investments to protect natural capital. They suggested several primary vehicles (growth opportunities) to achieve this:

- Implement policies that provide incentives for better farm conservation practices that support wildlife habitat; soil conservation; less chemical use; more organic production; erosion control measures; watershed protection; air and water quality protection; increase in green pasture; increase in strip farming; increase of no- and low-till farming; crop and livestock diversification; “smaller” agriculture; crop and livestock rotation; nature and wildlife preserves; reforestation; fruit and nut producing trees; prairie reclamation; wind farms; and more ponds and lakes.
- Implement policies that protect air and water quality by regulating and monitoring feedlots and confinement manure pits;
- Implement policies that protect farmland by
  - ▷ Controlling urban sprawl and establishing tighter zoning restrictions for housing developments on farmland;
  - ▷ Offering conservation easements; and
  - ▷ Offering programs that help farmers sell prime farmland to DNR for conservation.

Despite common perceptions that conventional producers are unconcerned with environmental issues, these results provide strong evidence that show otherwise. Participating women were greatly concerned about protecting the environment where they live and work and where their successors will live and work. These concerns provide opportunities for farm service providers to partner with women landowners to create ecologically sound systems of agriculture that meet their common goals.

## Social Capital

Social capital includes networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity that inhere in human relationships. Social capital is another important category of interest to women, constituting 12.9 percent of responses and ranking fourth in the capitals lineup.

Perhaps more importantly, women say they have excellent access to social capital when compared to social capital growth opportunities (the assets-to-needs ratio is 1.9, where a value above one represents more assets than needs). This includes bonding and bridging social capital, both of which are critical for mobilizing resources. Recall that bonding social capital is represented by strong bonding relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and even co-workers. These relationships provide women landowners a personal support network in which they feel safe and comfortable. However, the downside is that they often provide little new information as the same information is circulated and recycled within exclusive groups. By contrast, bridging social capital tends to be a source of new information as it links different groups with different interests. Bridging relationships represent “weak” ties women landowners have with individuals and organizations both within and outside their communities.

When women were asked about sources most helpful for making decisions or achieving “dreams” for their land or agriculture, women cited themselves and their faith, other people and organizations, and the media. We coded a total of 551 resource references. Of these, 52 percent were “other people” related (in contrast to themselves, their faith, or the media). Helpful “other people” resources included people within women’s family and social circles (husbands, parents, children, siblings, friends, neighbors, and co-workers). Yet women also are mindful of bridging resources. As discussed in the section on human capital, women consulted a variety of bridging sources of social capital including public sector farm organizations such as the NRCS, FSA, ISU Extension, and community college personnel to help them make decisions. They also consulted private sector law and financial experts, including the Farm Bureau, as well as experienced producers, elders, feed co-ops, agronomists, land tenants, and local business owners.

Of the 287 references to human sources of help in decision making, 61 percent of responses were sources of bridging social capital whereas 39 percent were sources of bonding social capital. Having access to both types of social capital gives women personal support networks while providing them with new information they can use to make informed decisions about their land and/or farm operation.

Despite women’s clear access to and use of social capital, they also saw potential for growth of more social capital. When women were asked what they would like to see happen for land and agriculture in their area and effective strategies for helping women make good decisions about the land to achieve their future dreams, they generated the following wish list for future investment efforts:

- Improve support networks for women by providing opportunities for them to build both bonding and bridging social capital. Women suggested this could be achieved by forming groups and holding meetings. In this regard, women noted that:
  - Groups should be small or at least have small breakout sessions to make women feel comfortable;
  - Organizers should be conscious of other factors that make women feel welcome and heard at meetings (this might mean maintaining an informal atmosphere, having a woman facilitator, arranging tables and chairs in a circle, giving everyone getting a chance to speak, etc.);
  - Some meetings should be exclusively for women although some were willing to accommodate whole farm families;
  - Groups might be organized around special topics;
  - Meetings should connect women with supportive, respectful professionals who provide them with useful information;
  - Educational workshops should offer women a non-intimidating opportunity to practice signing up for government programs;
  - Regular discussion group meetings would help women discuss topics important to them;
  - Discussion groups should be linked with action—meetings that initiate special projects will encourage women to take action together;

- Women want more diverse groups of women;
- Efforts should be made to reach out to marginalized women;
- Women want opportunities to build trust and better relationships with others;
- Women landowners want opportunities to meet government representatives;
- Meetings should encourage interaction and collaboration among attendees;
- Meetings should be formed around resources available to women landowners;
- Rebuild neighboring and community;
- Increase rural-urban communication opportunities;
- Explore ways to make producer-consumer connections;
- Foster a sense of community; and
- Establish mentoring programs and partnerships.

## Financial Capital

Women brought up issues related to financial capital 8.8 percent of the time when asked about their assets and visions for the land. Furthermore, women cited more financial needs than assets (indicated by the assets-to-needs ratio of 0.8). It is also worth noting that women in the project understood the importance of land ownership much more broadly than the traditional regard for land as a source of wealth and individual income to cover living expenses (the result of production or cash-rent arrangements). Women landowners also viewed the land as an asset and source of investment to support:

- A current income stream for extended family members, not just immediate family members;
- A place of business;
- An opportunity to pursue a meaningful livelihood;
- Income security for unexpected events such as death of a family member;
- A source of future individual income well into retirement;
- A source of future revenue and financial security to successors who survive women landowners;
- A tangible culmination of family labor investments; and
- An expression of access women have to lenders (sources of financial wealth outside the family).

Results from these sessions suggest women are expanding a reactionary role of caregiving into an active role of planning by becoming active care planners. In this study, we see women landowners who are concerned for and acting not only on behalf of their current personal financial situation but also their *future* financial situation for their immediate and extended family. Land ownership solidified and stabilized business relationships women had with lenders, which made farm management and decision making easier.

Despite women's understanding of the land as an important source of capital to invest, some women voiced concerns about their ability to use the land to secure a stable financial future for their families. Women suggested dreams that had not yet been implemented and various strategies that would help them achieve their financial goals:

- Work the land: Some women wanted to make a reasonable living from the farm so they could farm full-time. The means for achieving this was to increase profit margins for farming. Women suggested this could be achieved through several means including:
  - Diversifying farm operations;
  - Engaging in value-added farming;
  - Increasing government conservation payments;
  - Expanding farm subsidies to include more crops;
  - Finding new marketing opportunities;
  - Decreasing taxes (which for some meant controlling the price of land and protecting it from outside investment);
  - Gaining control over external forces such as gas prices and market prices;
  - Reducing production costs; and
  - Gaining access to affordable health insurance.
- Buy new land: Many women wanted to buy new and/or adjoining land.
- Rent out the land: Some women wanted to find a tenant to rent the land for agricultural production. Others envisioned renting out the land for agro-tourism opportunities such as hunting or nature and recreational development.
- Sell the land: Some women wanted to fund their retirement by selling the land to family members and occasionally to people outside the family (which ranged from developers to neighbors). Some women proposed selling the land for commercial development while others wanted to find young producers to keep the land in agriculture and/or engage in farming with conservation in mind.
- Gain more community support for economic development—in particular, small local business development.

In summary, it appears from the analysis of financial capital that women landowners actively strategize to maximize the financial benefits for their family and future generations, demonstrating that women landowners view financial capital as a means to a goal, not an end in itself.

## Political Capital

Political capital was one of two types of capital least referred to by women, comprising only 3.9 percent of responses. At some level and relative to the other capitals, this suggests a lack of a strong collective consciousness about the important role political life plays in achieving the goals of women landowners. However, the interpretation becomes more complex and layered when we compare the number of times political assets are referenced as opposed to needs. In this instance, we find only 11 references to political assets in contrast to 110 references to needs, resulting in an assets-to-needs ratio that is .1.

While women understand the utility of getting involved in local politics as a way to establish a distinct women's voice in agriculture, women in the listening sessions clearly struggled to identify actual

opportunities to express themselves. “I don’t have any rights;” “I make no decisions, I cash rent [the land] out.” Regarding the issue of cash rent, tenants, specialists, and managers consistently recommend cash rent to the women, with the assumption women landowners want income without responsibility. “Oh, you don’t want to do THAT!” is what women tell facilitators they hear all the time. Facilitators can confirm this experience firsthand, having witnessed this phenomenon at a Level II learning session on leases where the specialist arbitrarily crossed out crop share as not worthy of consideration with those particular words. Women recall such treatment with indignation and anger—perhaps seeking to find ways to preserve their relationship to the land. Women in several listening sessions, however, did identify opportunities that might help them find their voice. These women suggested:

- Establishing and strengthening relationships with local, county, regional, and state government representatives;
- Voicing input on the new Farm Bill;
- Taking leadership roles in farm organizations;
- Creating a women’s political coalition to establish a women’s voice in agriculture;
- Understanding policy and zoning issues in areas that affect women landowners and getting involved in those issues;
- Participating in public issues (standing up and being heard);
- Volunteering and supporting other women in community leadership and decision-making roles including local government;
- Addressing paternalistic thinking and attitudes; and
- Voting.

Despite what appears to be the beginnings of a women’s political consciousness, listening session facilitators noted that in general, women were rather quiet on the topic of political action items. These findings suggest that a lack of political opportunity combined with a sense of powerless may be a more accurate portrayal of what women experience when navigating the political landscape, a situation that could be improved by organizing women around specific issues to raise their political consciousness and influence.

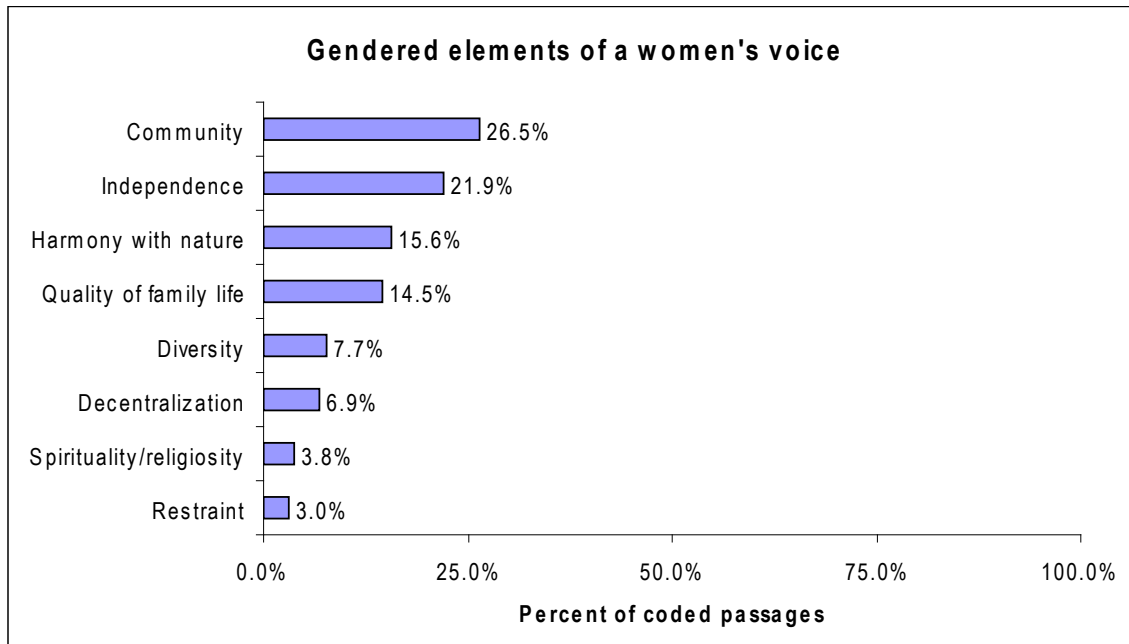
## **Built Capital**

According to the content analysis, women were least occupied with built capital issues. Only 1.6 percent of the total content referred to built capital, and the assets-to-needs ratio was 1.5. Among women who did cite built capital as important, the overwhelming majority mentioned computers and the Internet as a source of built capital assets, followed by farm buildings and equipment. Regarding growth opportunities, several women mentioned the need for improving rural services and infrastructure such as high-speed Internet access, better roads, and more schools to build up “public” built capital. Some women also brought up the need for improving “personal” or “individual” built capital by building a new home, making improvements to existing homes, constructing or repairing fencing, repairing and beautifying outbuildings, and beautifying farm grounds.

# Understanding Assets and Opportunities for Iowa’s Women Landowners: The Gendered Elements of the Alternative Agriculture Paradigm

In 1990, Beus and Dunlap created a typology characterizing values associated with conventional agriculture and those associated with the alternative agriculture movement. In their article on the elements of the alternative agriculture paradigm, they proposed six “elemental” categories and detailed specific philosophical differences between the two systems of agriculture. These categories were independence, decentralization, community, harmony with nature, diversity, and restraint. In 1998, Chiappe and Flora added two “gendered” elements to Beus and Dunlap’s typology—quality of family life and religiosity that were specific to farm women involved in their studies.

Data from women in the WLL<sup>sm</sup> project support the proposition that there is a “gendered location” within agriculture, confirmed by the presence of 1508 passages coded using this framework. Women see themselves situated differently or at least differently than the current, male dominated, “conventional” paradigm would suggest (Figure 7). For instance, “community” was the richest category of responses represented (26.5%). It is followed by independence (21.9% of responses), which is often linked to more traditional, paternalistic attitudes. However, in this case, the data show that women frame independence as a way to build community by eschewing consolidation and corporate farming and acting in ways that benefit their families, the land, and their neighbors. Women therefore associate independence not with individualism but with *independent communities*. While the women are clear about who they are as individuals, they see themselves as the locus of connections to family, community and nature.



**Figure 7. Gendered elements of a women’s voice**

Women also think temporally. That is, women think forward and backward in time; decisions are not limited to the here and now, or even the future or the past, but encompass all of these. These factors may result in gendered thinking and planning patterns that are consistently more complex than many management tools, agency staff advice, and programs realize and accommodate.

These findings are consistent with what facilitators heard in the sessions and continue to be relevant as facilitators train local teams, which include male agency staff, RC&D coordinators, Extension, and others to work with the program. During these training sessions, facilitators note that male agency representatives, when asked “What are the connections that women have with land in your county/area?” invariably describe confusion, distress, and anxiety while the women only occasionally characterize themselves this way. This disconnect has important implications for women if the majority of agency support staff see them as confused and distressed when they seek advice and ask questions related to the conduct of their affairs in managing their land. It also suggests that empowering women who own the land can be important for increasing sustainable action and attitudes in farming systems. Data also suggest that more widespread, institutionalized consideration is needed to support women’s values of spirituality and quality of life.

## **Independence**

In the literature on gendered elements of the alternative agriculture paradigm, values for agricultural independence are characterized by small, low capital production units; reduced reliance on fossil fuels, inputs (chemicals), and credit; more personal and community self-sufficiency; and an emphasis on personal knowledge and skills. Women in the listening sessions focused on the two latter aspects.

Using the gendered elements of alternative agriculture paradigm as the coding framework, one-fifth (21.9%) of the content analyzed fell into this category (ranking second out of the eight categories). Women used a variety of terms to describe a desire for independence, including the term “family farm.” References to family farms were coded as independence as it relates to personal and community self-sufficiency and women’s protest against externally controlled, industrialized agriculture. It was also coded under the heading of decentralization as it relates to more farmers and more dispersed control of land and capital. Finally, we coded “family farm” as quality family life since values for independence may be integrated into satisfaction with family life and women consider family farming essential for spending more time with their families while engaging in production activities.

Women also frequently used the term “freedom” to describe their relationship to the land and/or dreams for the land. References to land as inheritance were also coded as independence based on the logic that respondents view land as a means to family (and community) self-sufficiency. Income and investments were also included in this category as were pride of ownership. Other equally important dimensions of independence that appeared in the listening sessions were women’s recognition of knowledge and education as a means to make women more independent. Political involvement and

voice were also coded as references to independence, as were requests for more supportive agricultural policies, jobs and economic development, references to less government, local control and ownership and communication.

Based on the content analysis, the topic of independence ranked second out of the eight categories. Women identified multiple dimensions of independence and ways to achieve it. Specifically,

**Women View the Family-Owned Farm as an Expression of Financial, Political, and Cultural Independence and Resistance.** Protection of the family farm as a means to maintain independence is regarded as a way to resist outside and/or industrial control. From a strictly utilitarian standpoint, land is a source of current and future income and a source of income should a working family member die. And while women recognize the role of land in asserting their financial independence, they recognize that land ownership is also a family asset to be preserved and passed down to protect the independence and self-sufficiency of generations to come. Land ownership is also a means through which women gain some level of influence, respect and legitimacy within their communities when they negotiate with farm service businesses, tenants, and lenders. Not only does farm ownership provide women a source of economic security and social status, but it is also a source of pride, self-esteem, and confidence. For women in the listening sessions, the persistence and survival of the family farm is a symbol of independence from outside control. In a nutshell, women want “the family farm [to] stay intact and be profitable, able to support the family needs, to be independently sufficient, and not have to rely so heavily on government support.”

**Women Want Freedom from Outside Control.** Women frequently use the term “freedom” to describe their connection to the land and agriculture. Their use of this term may have connections to broader sociocultural values for freedom and independence and ties to farming “sub” cultures which emphasize the importance—even necessity—of self-reliance. Women landowners want to control their own destinies and futures and make their own well-informed land management and production decisions. “It’s time for women to understand and make decisions based on their interests” (bold in original). Barriers they cite include marginal farm profitability which requires many to earn an income off the farm to support the farm; corporate farming; absentee land ownership; eminent domain; and lack of control over the price of inputs, commodity markets, outside investors, and land prices. There is general consensus among the women that local ownership, control, and decision-making is necessary for healthy communities.

**Women View Knowledge and Learning as a Way to Achieve Independence.** Women know that knowledge leads to more self-sufficiency. Thus, they want access to information *and* they want new farmers, their own children, and others in the community to have access to information. Women landowners want to be informed and educated, equipped with the breadth and depth of knowledge to make good decisions. “[We want] education on new practices, technology, bookkeeping, etc.” Women are also keenly interested in other farm-related issues such as marketing, estate planning, financial planning, government farm programs, diversified agriculture, conservation programs, lease options,



and more. Women realize, however, that they must be persistent and methodical about their efforts to gain access to new knowledge, while at the same time understanding that new knowledge alone is a necessary but insufficient step towards achieving independence. Hence, women are very clear about the kinds of settings in which the best learning takes place. “Traditional education and programs are not for women. The sessions are not inviting to women and many times women are not invited.” More specific suggestions on how women want to receive information appear in the section on Strategies for Reaching Women Farmland Owners.

**Women Know They Have Assets and Want to Use Them to Become Empowered.** Women want to build on their strengths and be honored by others for the strengths they possess. They understand they have knowledge and skills related to agriculture that are often undervalued. “[We want] mentors [who] recognize and honor what we know.” Women want to become empowered, to understand the impacts they can have: “Do women know how [we] can have an impact?” Some identified several challenges to this. “Women don’t think of themselves as landowners and having the responsibility;” “[we need to] have confidence in our thoughts and decisions.” Some of these sentiments may be attributable to the general sense that women’s voices in agriculture are neither heard, legitimated, nor respected. Besides feeling excluded, some women say they face real dangers such as harassment and abuse. An activity crucial for empowerment is “communication [which] will help women not be taken advantage of.”

**Women Support Agricultural Diversification to Improve Self-Reliance.** Women want to be able to grow food “to feed ourselves,” in case “everything goes to hell.” Many support locally grown food, integrated crop and livestock production, and access to new markets to ensure independence for themselves and their communities. “[We want to] preserve the family farm with local control and farm value-added industries.” “[We need] to find new avenues for marketing;” “increase the financial stability of farmers;” “protect [ourselves] from outside investors” and “find a way to have an adequate income.” These remarks suggest women want more control over the forces of production and marketing to create economic development opportunities that buoy the health, growth, and viability of their communities. Besides being able “to feed ourselves,” “[we want] small farms, more neighbors, a wider variety of crops, fair prices, and independent, competitive and more markets.” Alternative fuels and energy self-sufficiency were also mentioned although less frequently.

**Women Understand Political Involvement As a Way to Change Policy but Have Difficulty Gaining Access.** Women landowners recognize that becoming involved in community and other local decision-making processes could protect their ability to be self-sufficient: “[Our] voice needs to be heard;” “[women need to] be involved and aware of government rules including at the county level—this is necessary;” “policy currently opposes dreams and visions.” Women also understand active involvement in political issues at a variety of levels could give them voice and power to influence policy: “[We need] representation of women in terms of taxes, elected officials, [and] having a voice.” “We need to find ways to let legislators know what women want!” “How can women into leadership roles in farm organizations?” Despite this recognition, women acknowledge difficulty in becoming politically involved.

As many participants noted, women often feel intimidated and unwelcome by structures and environments in which they do not traditionally function. The first step requires an (agri)cultural shift to “legitimize women’s voices and needs.” Women may then feel more comfortable “speaking up” and “having a voice and being heard.”

Facilitators noted the distance between the women landowners and a coherent political voice. While political involvement was not a strong theme in the listening sessions, it was not completely absent—some women did have “strong comments and sparks.” One group suggested women form a coalition to meet quarterly to discuss topics with invited speakers. However, facilitator observations in the listening sessions suggest that while women may be politically aware, they may lack the confidence, skills, and motivation to act upon it, each of which are essential to women’s effective participation in political life.

## Decentralization

Only seven percent of the women’s content fit Beus and Dunlap’s concept of “decentralization” in the alternative agriculture paradigm. Decentralization is characterized by more local/regional production, processing, and marketing; more farmers; and dispersed control of land, resources, and capital. As mentioned earlier, “family farm” was coded as reference to decentralization because of its political connotations as protest against centralized agriculture. Family farms represent dispersed control of land, resources, and capital. The frequent statements women made about the need for attracting young farmers to work the land were coded as decentralization because of its implication for more farmers.

**The women’s discourse closely ties notions of decentralization to independence.** Use of the politically charged term “family farm” in and of itself implies independence from more centrally controlled agriculture. Women frequently used the term “corporate” to refer to the large-scale industrialized farming complex: “[We need to] emphasize family farms, not commercial; less corporations, more family farms” although one participant noted, “There is a difference between a farm corporation and corporate farming.”

**Women linked decentralization to small scale farming through their support for new farmers, young farmers, and many farmers** for a “smaller, diverse agriculture” illustrated by dreams “more people on the land;” “local food;” “eggs’ signs everywhere;” and “seeing animals instead of just smelling them.” Women invariably support activities and policies that encourage young and new families to farm. On one hand, women identified the need to create policies that *support* new and young farmers. Such policies will provide financial incentives for new farmers, beginning farmer loan programs, controlled land and rental prices, young farmer mentoring programs, and educational programming for youth and young farmers. On the same token, women also identified the need to create policies that *limit* opportunities for industrial farming. Some of the policy mechanisms women suggest in this regard are policies that withdraw support from industrialized farm operations, such as banning feedlots and establishing zoning restrictions on concentrated animal confinement operations (CAFOs).

## Community

Women referred to “community” more than any other gendered element, comprising 26.5 percent of the content coded in this framework. According to Beus and Dunlap (1990), “community” emphasizes increased cooperation; preservation of farm traditions and rural culture; the essentiality of small communities; farm work as rewarding; labor as meaningful; farming as a way of life; and emphasis on quality and beauty. At a practical, analytical level, references to family pride were coded as community because of its connotation as a shared identity with farm tradition and culture. However, we did not include pride of ownership in this category as it refers more to financial independence instead of a shared sense of collective identity. Notions of home, work ethic, morality, legacy, a sense of family history and memories, sense of community, sense of place, the joys and virtues of farming, sources of shared identity, greater appreciation of the role of the farmer, support groups and networks, cooperation, and better urban-rural linkages through improved producer understanding and food safety education were all coded as dimensions of “community.”

**Women in the listening sessions articulated a strong connection to community.** Agriculture and land ownership connect women to their past and their future, their heritage and their legacy. Regarding the former, women landowners say their relationship to the land connects them to previous generations reinforcing a common sense of shared family and community history, as well as common values. In terms of legacy, many women say it has been “everything” to them—“life, love, and livelihood” and will be for generations to come. Women also believe farming and land ownership to be an expression of beauty and creativity, where people have the opportunity to experience beauty and be inspired by it.

**Women cite the quality, beauty and essence of rural life as the positive core of their communities.** Women share with their families, neighbors, and other community members a deep appreciation and respect for “dirt,” “nature,” “open spaces,” “blue skies,” “harvest,” “gardening,” “sunsets,” “the good life.” These common values bind women and others together to preserve the rural quality of life they enjoy. Yet many feel the quality, beauty, and essence of rural life is being eroded by the exodus of young people from rural communities, the need for farm families to secure off-farm sources of income, and development pressure such as urban sprawl. Women cite the presence of young people as critical to the survival of their communities and therefore support use of the land to provide youth with economic opportunities that encourage them to stay.

For some women, **farm life embodies a set of unique values that become the basis for meaningful social interaction.** Farming and land ownership is a forum for “communication,” “communal labor,” “cooperation,” “friendship,” “support networks,” “trust,” and “more people to come together.” It is an opportunity to “connect people of interest” and to “rebuild neighboring.” Farming is an opportunity for people to work together to promote products, share in decision-making, and share labor responsibilities. Farming is a source of connection between people who may otherwise be disconnected from their families, neighbors, and their communities.

**Women recognize the role of farming communities for improving public food and health education.** These women understood farming and land ownership as having an impact beyond geographically defined communities of place. They linked farming to broader spheres of influence such as communities of interest. For example, some women cited the role farmers play in improving rural-urban communication, increasing trust between producers and consumers, educating people about agriculture and food issues, and ensuring people know their food is safe.

For women in the listening sessions, community is important as “home,” not just a place to live. **Community consists of a web of connections, which go backward and forward in time.** They see strengthening connections with family, organizations, and other women as ways to strengthen their communities.

## Harmony with Nature

Of the eight gendered elements, women indirectly ranked “harmony with nature” third among the list of values, constituting 15.6 percent of the content using the gendered paradigm framework. “Harmony with nature” according to Beus and Dunlap (1990) embodies the following notions: agriculture should promote environmental stewardship and conservation; agriculture should minimize the use of chemicals; humans are subject to nature; nature is valued for its own sake; natural ecosystems should be imitated; soil should be healthy; and food should be “natural”—both nutritious and minimally processed.

**Women landowners participating in the listening sessions exhibited an unmistakably clear and strong consciousness about land health issues and respecting nature intrinsically—not for its productive value, but because it is like “an old friend” and the sustenance of all life.** The women repeatedly articulated a great respect for the land and therefore, the need to be good stewards of the land. Respecting nature for its own sake not only suggests, but *requires* landowners to imitate natural ecosystems as best they can within the socioeconomic and sociopolitical constraints they face. For many of the women, imitation of natural process means instituting conservation practices that respect and complement the natural landscape; these women are advocates for conservation on working lands. Many of the women landowners are already (and want to continue) using the land to build up the soils, provide wildlife habitat, restore the land to prairie, produce alternative energy, employ chemical-free farming methods, reduce erosion through low- and no-till practices, reduce production acreage, convert the land to pasture, and improve water and air quality. Women also expressed a desire to produce good and healthy food.

## Diversity

Diversity issues ranked fifth (7.7%) according to the content analysis of women’s responses using the gendered elements framework. Diversity encompasses biological diversity; polyculture (both crop and

livestock); multiple crops in rotations; integration of crops and livestock; and locally adapted production systems implying geographically differentiated and appropriate biological diversity.

Already suggested in the section on independence is that **women support diversification in agriculture as a means to protect their independence**. And although Beus and Dunlap (1990) and Chiappe and Flora (1998) discuss how biodiversity figures into the alternative (and gendered) agriculture paradigm, one new dimension missing from those discussions that this study contributes is the notion of human diversity. Although the content for this category focused mostly on the need to support diverse plant and animal communities (both wild and domesticated), some women farmland owners at the listening sessions also noted the need to support diverse human communities exhibiting a variety of cultures, ages, and interests. Part of this means welcoming newcomers and encouraging fresh, new, and innovative ideas.

## Restraint

Restraint is characterized by limited consumption or refraining from consumption to benefit future generations; adhering to non materialistic principles; implementing conservation/land practices to benefit future generations; using fuels based on renewable resources; considering all costs associated with agriculture (including environmental and social costs, not just financial costs); maintaining a skepticism of science and technology and related biotechnical regimes; engaging in self discovery; and maintaining simple lifestyles and a sense of responsibility.

Given the broader cultural context, women articulated little outright interest in restraint, with only 3 percent of responses falling in this category. However, this may be due to the connection women make between the connected notions of restraint, conservation, and the need to sustain future generations. These data suggest that **the primary link women landowners make with notions of restraint have to do with implementing conservation practices today to ensure the land can sustain the future generations of tomorrow**. “[We have a] responsibility to care for land not only to best of our ability, but for future generations.” To a lesser extent, women also wanted to “get back to basics” and pursue simpler lifestyles to “enjoy the natural pleasures of life.” Women also expressed a need to act “responsibly” when it comes to caring for the land, and often related that responsibility to conserving the land or leaving it “better than they found it.”

## Quality Family Life

Quality family life is important to women, constituting 14.5 percent of their responses (ranking fourth out of eight categories). Chiappe and Flora (1998) describe the element of quality family life in terms of being able to spend extra time with family; improving human health by eliminating chemicals from agricultural practices (and consumption); and reducing stress. Although Chiappe and Flora do not specifically include the notion of “security” and “privacy” in this category, we found that women relied

on these factors as a mechanism to reduce stress and increase their sense of peace. We also included statements such as “place to raise a family or [be] near family” as well as “family farm” because these remarks imply that the women are able to spend more time with their family.

**Quality of family life encapsulates a range of notions for women landowners and seems to be the compelling reason why women value their relationship to the land so much.** Women in the listening sessions agree that farming provides them with the quality of life they seek in so many differently nuanced, but related ways: The farm contributes to their physical health by providing “fresh, clean air;” healthy food; outdoor opportunities; a “safer environment;” and “less chemicals”—all of which contain healing properties necessary for living a “good, clean life.” Ironically, some women may agree while at the same time disputing this claim by questioning the role farming has played in contributing to regionally high cancer rates (“why is everyone getting more cancer in our area?;” “[we need] more awareness on the long-term effects of chemicals;” “[we] have a fear of cancer from chemicals”). Exacerbating the issue of conflicting health benefits farm life seems to offer, women also identified another clear impediment to women’s health—limited access to affordable health insurance.

The social-psychological benefits of farm life were also contested. While some women said time on the farm improves mental health, others said it weakened it. The positive mental health aspects that land ownership contributes are the sense of security it offers women. The farm is also an oasis of peace, serenity, safety, and privacy. The downside, however, is that farmland ownership and farm participation can also be a source of worry.

Women also say the farm is a good place for raising children. In fact, one woman announced it was the only place to raise a family—any other place would be unacceptable. Indeed, farming allows women to stay close to their immediate and extended families. Both kinds of kinship networks provide women the social support they seek. In addition to providing familial access, the farming lifestyle also allows women to spend more time with family since the whole family works together to engage in productive, financially rewarding work. Hence, parents are able to spend more time with each other and their children compared to the alternative of having several family members work at jobs geography dispersed. More time spent with children means farming couples can spend more time teaching and reinforcing family farm values and work ethics.

## **Spirituality/Religiosity**

Spirituality and religiosity are both embodied in a sense of faith and belief in a greater power (religiously defined or otherwise). According to Chiappe and Flora (1998), in many cultures spirituality and religion are regarded as “women’s work,” despite men’s participation in formal religious leadership roles. Based on this typology, spirituality and religiosity are expressed through a connection with nature that is not based on the land’s use value (utilitarianism) but which transcends productive

value. And while only 3.8 percent of the women's responses were coded as spiritual or religious in nature, "For [women in many cultures], spirituality mediate[s] and require[s] their honoring of nature. Moreover, listening to nature in order to work with it increase[s] their feelings of spiritual wholeness" (Chiappe and Flora, 1998:390).

**Terms women use to express their relationship to the land and agriculture are often spiritual and/or religious. Furthermore, spirituality is a strong theme in all of the sessions although not always explicitly so.** Some of the implicit references to spirituality were expressed through peacefulness, connectedness, stewardship, and especially a sense of wholeness (qualities we often coded into other categories as well such as harmony with nature, community and quality of family life). However, several women used overtly religious language to describe their relationship to the land, describing it as "God's gift," "God's glory," "blessed," and the source of "spiritual guidance" and "faith." Many also said prayer was important in defining their relationship to the land and presumably for helping them effectively and responsibly managing it. One participant remarked that "God lends the land to us" and thus human tenure is temporary; another said the land was a manifestation of God and farming a "ministry." Thus, it is not surprising that women landowners feel a meaningful sense of stewardship to nurture and care for the land as an expression of their spiritual health and representation of their relationship to God.

Other phrases and words with spiritual connotations such as "beautiful treasure," "replenished life," "commitment," and "love of the land" illustrate the depth, breadth, and complexity of women's relationships to the land and how intrinsic their spiritual values are in sustaining their way of life. Many women landowners are living their spiritual values through the ethical treatment of the land and its inhabitants (animal and otherwise).

## Strategies for Reaching Women Farmland Owners

In addition to important values and goals documented in the listening sessions, information discussed in this section was also gleaned from 410 evaluations women completed at the end of the listening sessions. These evaluations offer clear advice in terms of information women want to receive about farm options and how they want to receive that information.

### Information for Women

Women in the listening sessions expressed clear interest in participating in:

- Informational meetings on specific topics including:
- Government farm programs
- Conservation practices
- Estate planning

- Marketing and market alternatives
- Financial planning
- Financing
- Land value
- Lease options
- Options for marginal land
- Agricultural policy
- Diversification
- Crop management
- Animal husbandry
- Human health impacts of chemical use
- Farm safety
- Health insurance
- Pest control
- Zoning regulations
- Risk management
- Alternative energy and biorenewables
- Eminent domain
- Technology
- Bookkeeping
- Workshops for completing forms for specific government programs; and
- Opportunities to meet and share information with local government to discuss environmental issues and conservation activities.

## Ways in which Women Want Information

Women prefer to receive the information they seek in the following formats:

- **Regular, single, special topic meetings relevant to local women.** Women expressed a desire to hold frequent meetings where they can get together face-to-face to focus on relevant single topics rather than covering several topics at once.
- **Small groups.** Women prefer settings in which tables can be arranged to foster discussion among smaller groups of 6-8 people.
- **Women attendees.** Many of the women want to learn in the company of other women. They feel that limiting participation to women only will create the supportive atmosphere they seek.
- **Women presenters.** Women want to hear from other women about their expertise, knowledge, and experiences. They want to hear from women farmers, farm wives, managers, marketers, conservationists, bookkeepers, community college teachers, etc. However, they also want to hear from people who have something to contribute based on their experience with



lending, government farm programs, Cooperative Extension, etc., regardless of gender.

- **Active, informal learning.** Women want to be interactive at meetings, not wooden “recipients” of information. They want to take an active role in discussions and conversations where there are no “experts.” As evidence of this, women also want to visit successful farms, yet another indication of their desire to engage in active, rather than passive learning activities.
- **Emphasis on storytelling.** Women want to hear and tell stories with their peers to create social bonds and encourage learning. Creating a social environment in which everyone has something to learn from each other and there are no experts helps women feel comfortable.
- **Meeting in peaceful, neutral spaces.** Women want to hold meetings in places where they feel peaceful and comfortable. Women suggested holding meetings in places like nature centers, retreats, and community centers. Key to creating women-friendly learning environments is keeping the learning environment comfortable and informal. This can be achieved through careful planning meeting in appropriate physical spaces where all women are physically included (meaning places that are handicapped accessible), and where women can be a part of nature through access to windows and sunlight.
- **Child care support.** Other accommodations that will make women feel included is the provision of child care support for women with children attending meetings. This will alleviate the domestic responsibilities for some women and is recognized by women as an important source of genuine support.
- **Mentoring programs.** Women want to be mentored by other women with practical experience and insights. Mentorship programs should be flexible and largely informal.
- **Respect for women’s schedules.** Many women work by day either off or on the farm and cannot attend day time meetings. Most women wanted meetings after their work and domestic obligations could be met although this was mentioned as a challenge for older women who may not want to meet at night. Spring, summer, and early fall require women to be out in the field so meetings that are most inclusive will observe and honor the planting season.
- **Face-to-face meeting alternatives.** Women supported other forms of communication that may act as a substitute for women who cannot attend meetings, or which can supplement information women gather at the face-to-face meetings. Examples of meeting alternatives where women can communicate with each other include establishing a newsletter, initiating a hotline to answer agriculturally-related questions, and carving out an electronic space such as a listserv where women in agriculture can communicate.



## PRELIMINARY PROJECT IMPACTS

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According to the 410 participant evaluations from the listening sessions, giving women landowners a voice at the WLL<sup>sm</sup> listening sessions has already had the following impacts:

- 82% of the women completing the evaluation say participation allowed them to talk with other women associated with agriculture in the county.
- 60% say it provided them an opportunity to cultivate new connections with other women in agriculture and agricultural resource people.
- 75% learned that other women in agriculture share their concerns.
- Based on feedback to the listening sessions which were not specifically designed to be informational but rather a forum for listening to women and giving them voice, 23% of women say they learned about new programs and services available for assistance at the listening session.

And finally, 83 percent of the women want to participate in local WLL<sup>sm</sup> projects and events in the future, illustrating their commitment to these issues as well as the broad-based appeal of the WLL<sup>sm</sup> design process in effectively addressing the goals of women landowners across the state of Iowa.



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