

Farm Talk

by
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Invisible farmers, that's what a Penn State researcher calls them. She's talking about women who farm, not those women who live on farms with their husbands and take care of a few farm chores in addition to the housework. She's talking about fulltime women farmers. Carolyn Sachs is a rural sociologist whose book, "The Invisible Farmers: Women in Agricultural Production," details the difficult time women farmers have in today's agriculture.

I'm convinced that many women farmers aren't even counted. The Census Bureau has a unique way of counting the men who farm as farmers but their spouses, regardless of their involvement,

are categorized as unpaid family labor. Even today with all the equal opportunity talk Uncle Sam doesn't understand that some women who live on farms are farmers while some men who live on farms are not. A person's sex should really have nothing to do with job title. A woman who farms is a farmer. If she says she's a farmer, that's good enough for me, and if her husband who lives on the same farm works at a bank, then he's a banker and perhaps also a part-time farmer, depending on his involvement. On the other hand, many women whose primary farm involvement includes a garden and helping out at harvesttime could hardly be described as farmers.

These spouses whose time centers around the home or perhaps an off-farm job may not even qualify as part-time farmers.

When it gets right down to definitions, must a farmer till the soil himself to be a farmer? What about the man or woman who operates hundreds of acres and manages a number of hired workers in a complex, far-flung agricultural enterprise? That manager may never sit a tractor or personally drop a seed, and yet by any stretch of the imagination he or she is a farmer.

And what about the woman, married or otherwise, who spends most of her time managing the paperwork of a complex farm business? Let's say more than half of her time is spent balancing the books, paying the bills, figuring the taxes, ordering supplies and otherwise dealing with the day-to-day business aspects of farming. Would you say that person is a farmer?

Here on the Delmarva peninsula, it's hard to find women farmers in the traditional sense of the word. Those few that are readily identifiable usually are associated with horse farms. But look a little closer. There are hundreds of women farmers, maybe not identified by the Census Bureau, but farmers nonetheless. Some are spouses of farmers and are fully

employed in a dozen different ways in the farm business. They're working side by side with their husbands in the dairy barn, in the hog house, tilling the fields and harvesting the crops.

What about all those women who take care of the chickens in the nation's fourth largest broiler-producing area? In so many instances, the husband holds a full-time, off-farm job while tilling a few acres during the evenings and on weekends. Meanwhile his spouse, this unpaid family labor the Census Bureau talks about, manages the chickens on a day-to-day basis. She provides the labor, the watchful eye, the gently hand, the expertise that produces thousands and thousands of chickens and in many instances an income equal to that of her off-farm husband.

Another phenomena is occurring because of current economic hard times. Men are taking more off-farm jobs just to survive, leaving the farm in the caretaker status of their wives. In some cases this is a temporary situation aimed at keeping the wolf away from the door until the economics of farming improve. But in other cases, this off-farm income has proven to be so helpful that it will never change. Meanwhile some wives have found they enjoy this new status as a full-time farm operator

They enjoy the work, the decision making, the feeling of accomplishment as the dairy herd improves and the crop yields trend upward.

Whatever it is that makes farming worthwhile for men is also doing the same thing for some women. It's about time the government and some other institutions recognize this. The Penn State researcher says farming women lack access to land, credit and proper training, and she says many of them are relegated to second-class status on their own farms doing the farm work their husbands prefer not to do.

Perhaps it's time for farm women to speak up, to get organized, to demand the same kinds of training, information and services their husbands have been receiving for years. I know farm women belong to organizations but most of these are farm wife organizations, those aimed at helping a wife support her farming husband. But maybe it's time to go past the farm wife groups and deal directly with the problems of women who farm.

The classic example of the need for this kind of change was observed in a recent meeting of dairymen and their wives. While the program covered a number of topics of interest to the wife who is involved in the dairy business, she was encouraged to take a tour of some local scenic places while the men gained the worthwhile information. Believe me, ladies, that won't change as long as men plan the programs and as long as women are content to let them.

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Corn status reported

WASHINGTON, D.C. — All corn in farmer-owned grain reserves IV and V will remain in release status through May 31, according to Everett Rank, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service. Oats also will remain in release status through May 31.

Rank said the decision on the reserve commodities was made following a review today by USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation of average market prices, as reported by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, adjusted to reflect the market price received by farmers.

On May 1, the adjusted price for corn was \$3.26 per bushel, 11 cents above the release level of \$3.15 for reserve IV corn and 1 cent above the release level of \$3.25 for reserve V corn. The adjusted price for oats was \$1.75, 10 cents above the release level.

Daily markets reviewed by CCC for corn are Kansas City, Minneapolis, Omaha and St. Louis. The daily market reviewed for oats is Minneapolis.

For reserve IV and V corn loans, storage payments stopped and interest resumed on May 1. Storage payments stopped and interest resumed Feb. 1 for oats.

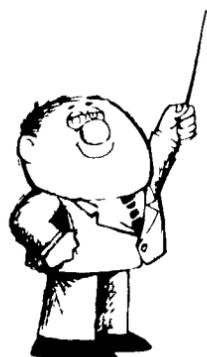
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