

Heart of the Farm – Women in Agriculture (HOF)
Program Statistics and Trends (2003 & 2006)
Jenny Vanderlin, Center for Dairy Profitability

The UW-Cooperative Extension and the Center for Dairy Profitability (CDP) began offering risk management education opportunities to farm women in 2002. Heart of the Farm – Women in Agriculture (HOF) one-day conferences introduced this targeted audience to the areas of risk management.

Demographics

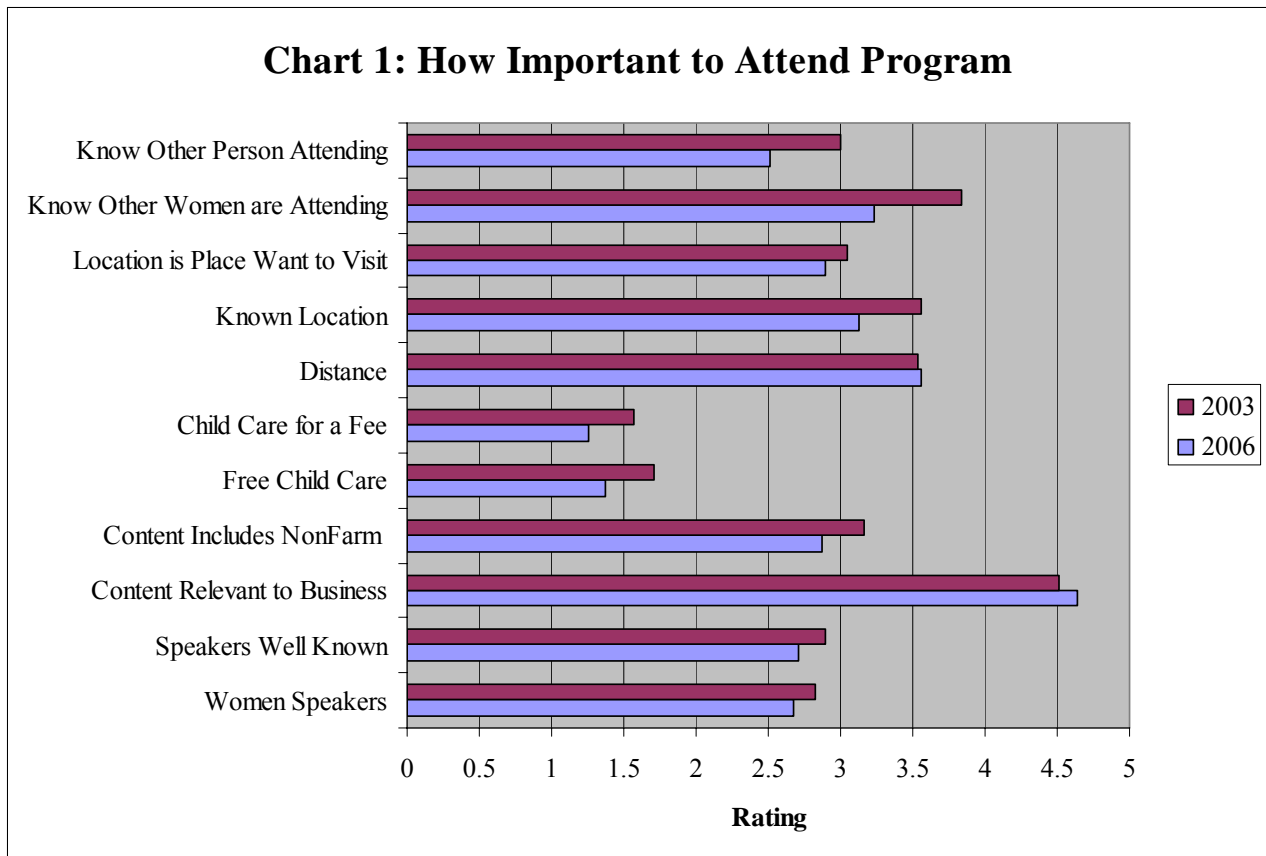
In 2003 we offered six conferences across the state at various locations, 4 conferences were held in 2006. For both years we used the same evaluation. The following chart represents the demographic makeup of the program participants in 2003 & 2006.

Table 1 – Conference Demographic Data		
	TOTAL 2003 (N = 85)	TOTAL 2006 (N = 84)
Type of Farm		
Dairy	60 (70.6%)	55 (65.5%)
Beef	6 (7.1%)	5 (6.0%)
Hog		
Grain	3 (3.5%)	6 (7.1%)
Other	16 (18.8%)	18 (21.4%)
Farm Size (Average Acres)		
	589	614
Age		
18-24	5 (6.0%)	6 (7.1%)
25-34	9 (10.7%)	9 (10.7%)
35-44	28 (33.3%)	24 (28.6%)
45-54	29 (34.5%)	24 (28.6%)
55-64	11 (13.1%)	18 (18.4%)
Over 65	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.6%)
Education		
Less than High School		1 (1.2%)
High School	30 (35.3%)	28 (34.1%)
Technical Program	15 (17.6%)	14 (17.1%)
2 Year College	11 (12.9%)	9 (11.0%)
4 Year College	23 (27.1%)	20 (24.4%)
Graduate School	6 (7.1%)	8 (9.8%)
Other	3 (3.6%)	2 (2.4%)
Do you work off-farm?		
Yes	37 (43.5%)	33 (40.7%)
No	48 (56.5%)	48 (59.3%)
If yes, hours / week worked (avg.)		
	30	29
Do you use a computer?		
Yes	75 (87.2%)	73 (86.9%)
No	11 (12.8%)	11 (13.1%)
If yes, do you have internet access?		
Yes	54 (81.8%)	52 (88.1%)
No	12 (18.2%)	7 (11.9%)

Attending Programs

Evaluations used in 2003 & 2006 were written up to help us meet the needs of women in agriculture. Participants were asked a series of questions related to the planning and implementation of future conferences. Questions on how to get farm women to attend programs; how welcome do they feel; how many programs do they attend, how far they are willing to travel and how to market the programs were asked.

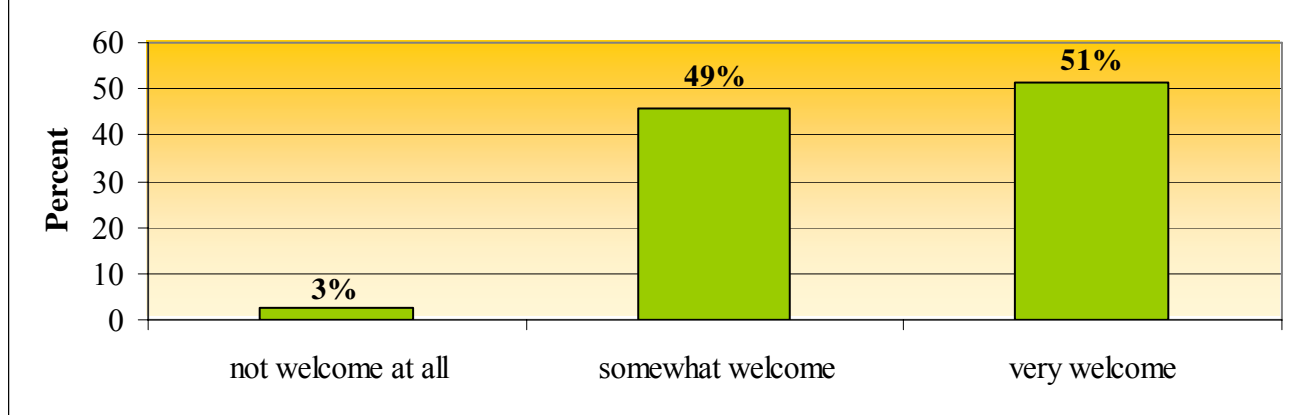
Chart 1 shows how participants rated certain items as to how important they were to attend a program. They rated each item on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 = least important to 5 = most important.



The three most important aspects that influence respondents to attend a farm program are: (1) content is relevant to my farm business; (2) knowing that other women will be attending the program; and (3) distance they would have to travel to attend the program. (In 2003 the third most important was the location of the program is in a town or city that is known to them).

Related to this question we asked participants to rate the reason for attending a farm program. Results from this question delineated in both years that more than 2/3 of the respondents indicated that Child Care (free or for a fee) was the least important issue that influenced their decision to attend a farm program. Only 1/3 of the respondents said that it was somewhat to very important for some of the program speakers to be women. In a related survey question, almost all (98.9%) of the respondents said that it was somewhat-very important to offer programs especially for women in agriculture. When farm programs are not designed specifically for women, there was almost a 50-50 split as to whether they felt very welcome or somewhat welcome (Chart 2). Almost 2 out of every 5 respondents (39%) said that this feeling influenced how useful they found the program.

**Chart 2:
How Welcome Did You Feel When You Attended a Farm
Program NOT Designed Especially for Women?**



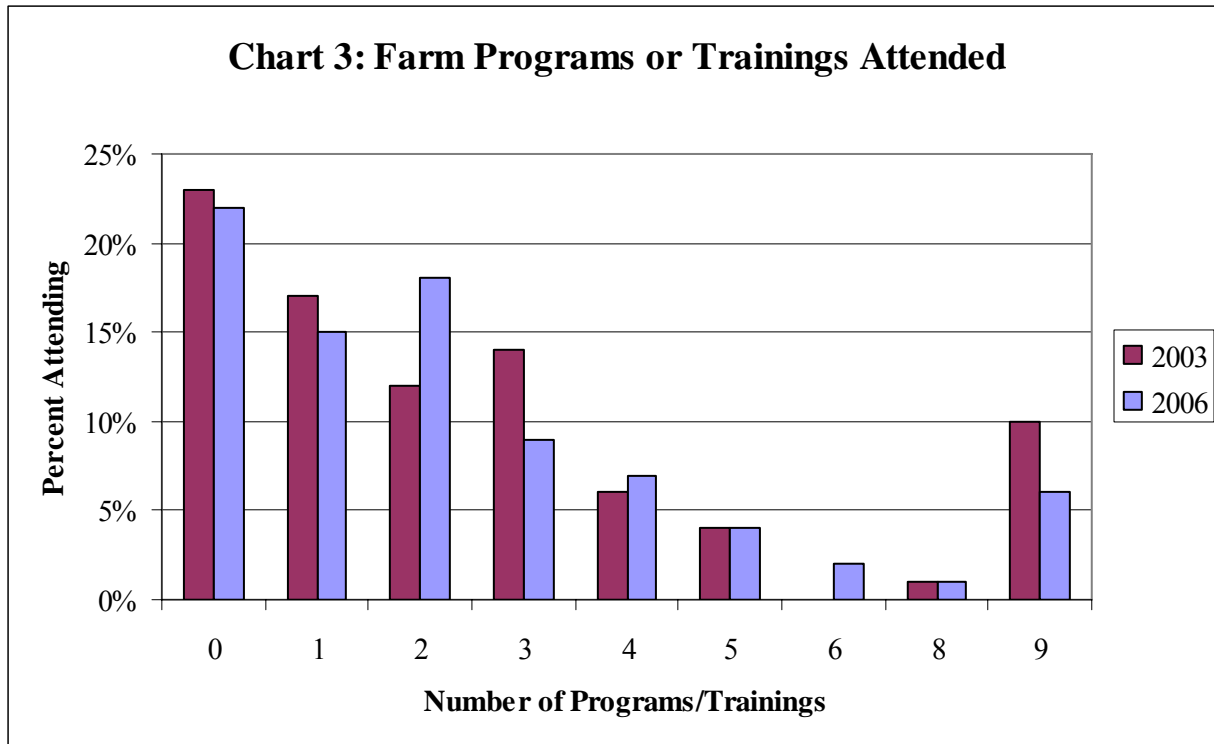
When asked what it was that made them feel welcome even if the program was NOT designed specifically for them, farm women said:

- "...questions answered equally, (instructors made) eye contact, (and they were) not talking down..."
- "(Program) focus on the things that women do on the farm-bookwork, calf raising, etc."
- "...made you feel like you belonged and mattered."
- "A gentleman met us at the door, shook hands, made eye contact and smiled. Said "welcome"."
- "Recognized as an active owner of the farm business."
- "I am completely involved in our dairy operation – programs that are aimed at our business involve men AND women."

Farm women attending HOF were then asked to explain why it was important to offer programs designed especially for women in agriculture. The top two reasons given by women (in all the years that we have offered HOF programs) were that (1) they wanted to socialize/share with other women and (2) women are important in agriculture. The women also recognize that even though agriculture is thought of as a male-dominated profession, women are important decision-makers in their farm operation.

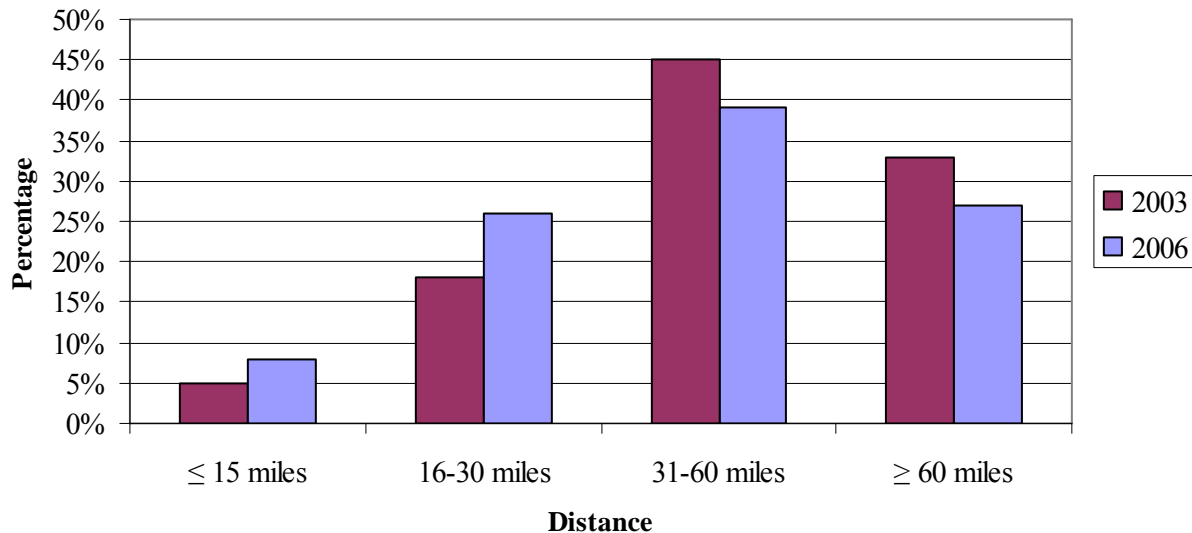
- "We all need to "belong" to a group of our peers. These ladies know how life is for us. I am not crazy and my new friends have proven it."
- "More women are expected to be an active participant in all areas of farm endeavor."
- "Programs just for women will mean that more will attend and learn more, but the men won't be there to take control."
- "I guess it's just to recognize the importance of women in any agricultural business."

Participants at both the 2003 and 2006 conferences were asked to think about the number of farm programs or trainings that they attend each year. Chart 3 illustrates their answers. On average one out of every five respondent does not attend any other programs or trainings per year.



Participants were asked to identify which of the programs they attended were sponsored by UW-Extension. Of those responding, only 1/3 of them said that the programs and/or trainings were sponsored by UW-Extension. It is possible that some respondents were not aware when the programs were sponsored by UWEX. A good example of this is that HOF is a UWEX program, and the respondent being at that program should have identified at least 1 UWEX program. If that is not the case, the fact still remains that many of the respondents were getting their farm training from other sectors.

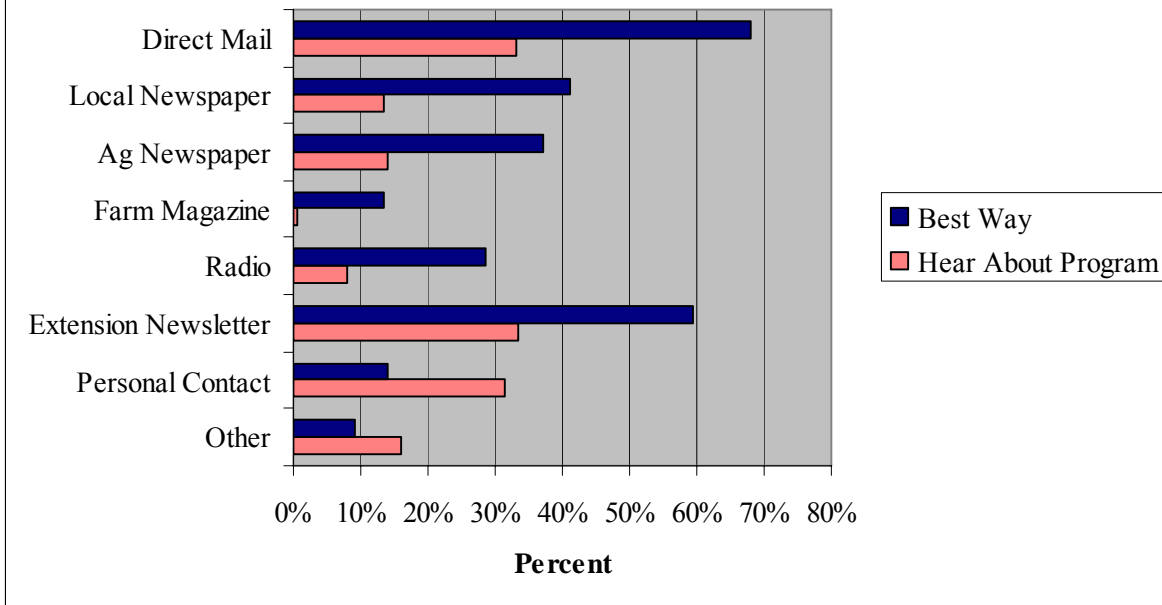
Chart 4: How Far Are You Willing to Travel to Attend a Farm Program or Training?



Program participants were asked logistical questions about program organization -- distance to travel, best day of the week to schedule a program. Chart 4 indicates that respondents were willing to travel a substantial distance to a farm program or training. In 2003, more than 40% were willing to travel at least an hour (31-60 miles) and over 30% were willing to travel longer, this decreased in 2006 with more willing to drive only an hour. In 2006, when asked if they would be willing to attend a 2-day conference, the responses were quite evenly split – 44% said they would and 56% said they would not (note: this is down from 2003). What is clear from this is that rural women are willing to drive relatively long distances to attend a program or training.

How participants hear about a program is crucial in terms of marketing and reaching the target audience. Chart 5 indicates that the way farm women actually hear about Heart of the Farm Conference Series and their perception about the BEST WAY to get information to women farmers. Participants have repeatedly answered that direct mail, Extension newsletters and local/Ag newspapers are the three best methods to promote the program. However, direct mail, Extension newsletters and *personal contact* were the ways they had heard about the program. In the “Other” category, the most common response was “from a friend,” “Previous Heart of the Farm Meetings”, and other professionals (UWEX-Agent, Center for Dairy Profitability).

Chart 6: Marketing Programs to Farm Women



Conclusion:

Evaluations from 2003 & 2006 HOF conferences indicate that the conferences fill a need for agriculture education targeting farm women. The evaluations provide insight for reasons farm women are attending with the most important reason being the topics are relevant to their business. However, there are dozens of UW-Extension and Wisconsin Technical College programs in their geographic areas that also offer topics relevant to their business, but they choose not to attend those traditionally predominant male meetings. Clearly, in addition to choosing for relevancy they are also seeking networking opportunities with other farm women. From 1997 to 2002 there was a 26% increase in the number of female principal farm operators. This target audience will continue to grow – but will also continue to be one of the hardest to reach audiences because of their multi-faceted lives. HOF must seek innovative ways to reach this important group. In addition to continuing one-day conference that provide introductory information on several topics, HOF will begin providing more in-depth skills development; still fitting within a one-day agenda. Newsletters and more frequent direct mail contact will also provide a network of support to participants. Female operators or partners influence many of the long-term decisions and investments on the farm. As they build their risk management skills the chances of success for their business also builds.