



Annie's Project – A Legacy Program

What is Annie's Project?

Annie's Project is a demand-driven program based on methodology designed in 2002 by Illinois Extension Educator, Ruth Hambleton and enhanced by Iowa State University Extension staff. This program was established for the simple purpose of providing educational opportunities to women farmers and ranchers so that they would have the tools to become more effective owners and partners in their agricultural operations.

Annie's Project is an 18-hour program held during a series of six classes, addressing the five areas of risk as identified by USDA (Crane, et. al. 2013). Classes are small in number and conducted locally. Women are provided a safe harbor to learn in a stress free, open environment. Local specialists provide the skilled guidance and expertise according to each topic presented, with clear learning objectives. Annie's Project graduates learn about estate planning, value-added agriculture, marketing and other management processes and how to make the decisions needed to manage their operations.

Annette Kohlhagen Fleck – the Woman Behind the Program

Annie Kohlhagen Fleck grew up in a small town in northern Illinois. As with many women in 1947 in the midwest, Annie married a farmer and began



ANNIE'S PROJECT
EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

life as a farm wife. She spent her lifetime learning how to be an involved business partner with her husband. Together they were successful, but it certainly wasn't easy. In honor of her mother Annie, Ruth Hambleton developed Annie's Project which involves women from all facets of agriculture; young, old, experienced, and inexperienced sharing their own experiences to facilitate learning and networking.



Annie's Project Core Values

All Annie's Project classes are designed with the same core values in mind. 1. Safe Harbor – All questions are welcomed for sharing and open discussion, 2. Connection – Connection to each other and to the professionals introduced to them during class, 3. Discovery – That moment of understand-

ing a concept, and 4. Guided Intelligence – When an attendee has enough background information and experience that she is willing to share. Annie’s Project is designed to empower farm and ranch women and give them the tools to work to increase their on-farm/ranch profitability and risk management capabilities. It also encourages participants to become leaders in their communities and advocate for agriculture.

Annie’s Project Key Principles

Annie’s Project addresses the five key areas of risk: financial, human resources, legal, marketing, and production (Crane, et.al. 2013). Local specialists are invited to serve as guest speakers and the remainder of the class time is devoted to discussion and hands-on activities. A learning environment is often created where mentoring between participants spontaneously happens. All this supports the mission of the program, which is “bringing financial security and well-being to women in rural communities where food, fiber, and fuel production are synonymous with family”.

Initially, a needs assessment showed that farm/ranch women wanted a program like Annie’s Project but there was a wide range of business skills as well as levels of farm experience within this group. Women new to farming often felt overwhelmed by their learning curve and lacked the confidence to ask the necessary questions and gather the information they needed to make good business decisions. Likewise in 2003, many familiar with farming lacked the technical computer knowledge to provide up-to-date recordkeeping for their banker. Annie’s Project set out to provide the tools necessary for all of these women to be successful and confident.

Relevance to the North Central Extension Risk Management Education Center (NCERME)

Annie’s Project began with a \$2,000 challenge block grant in 2002 from the NCERME. Initial classes were held in Centralia, Illinois and focused heavily on learning computer skills along with communication, marketing, leases, insurance, and financial analysis. Class facilitators quickly realized that participants all had varying degrees of agriculture and business knowledge and levels of farm experience. Future classes addressed this by creating and expanding the topics and focus to meet the needs of their students.

Beginning in 2004 other Annie’s Projects were funded by the NCERMEC for implementation in other states, including Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. Many of these were similar to the first Annie’s Project, now considered basic Annie’s, and others were more focused on a specific topic. “Women Marketing Grain” is an example of a program structured in the Annie’s format but focused on grain marketing strategies for farm women.

Other special emphasis audiences have benefitted from Annie’s Projects. In 2011, the NCERMEC funded a \$3,000 exploratory

grant focusing on the Hispanic audience in Michigan to determine actual need. This resulted in a full education grant the following year which was very successful.

Organizers quickly realized that Annie’s Project would have the ability to have far reaching effects. In 2004 a group of six extension educators from the University of Missouri and Iowa State University had the vision to create the National Leadership Team which allowed them to bring in their own unique experiences and continue updating and writing curriculum. They were able to test and improve Annie’s

“Annie’s Project helped me to see I have more knowledge than I thought I did about the operation of the farm. I have confidence to be more involved in our farm management and finances. I can troubleshoot, decrease costs and increase

methodology and created a sound evaluation tool to measure outcomes and impacts. Annie's Project soon became Annie's National Network Initiative for Education Success (ANNIES) which not only encompassed the new program components but in 2012 created a National office at Iowa State University. Having a central location gave those involved the oversight on Annie's Project but also the ability to create facilitator training materials, authority over course implementation and the ability to monitor the program making it consistent across all states.



On average, it costs \$300 per person for one six-week class. This has remained fairly constant over the years despite the rising cost of educational programming. Now that Annie's Project has grown and gained its "financial legs", partnerships, both financial and in-kind, have become the foundation of this program. These sponsors have seen the benefits of education for women and the impact it has on the profitability of each family's agricultural operation.

Impact surveys have shown that 94% of the attendees identified the all-women learning environment as key to their learning. 89% have shared the information they gained through class with their spouses or partners and 63% regularly access the on-line resources provided in class.

Annie's Project Today

In 2011 there was enough interest to develop and pilot a new Annie's program called Managing for Today and Tomorrow (MTT), a five-week, three-hour class. Women are most often the ones in the family that begin the difficult discussions related to retirement planning. MTT (sometimes referred to as Annie's II), focuses on the creation of legacies that can be maintained and transferred to future generations. The key topics are: succession planning, business planning, estate planning and retirement planning. Each topic is covered in detail giving participants the information and tools to develop their own map for their future.

By 2015, Annie's Project classes have been delivered in 33 states, state coordinators are active in 32 states, and 52 Annie's Project courses and 9 MTT classes were held in 2015 alone. Annie's Project – Education for Farm Women (APEFW) completed its transition to a 501(c)(3) with Ruth Hambleton serving as president of the Board of Directors. The 11-member board has focused on strategic growth assuring the continuation of quality programming as various initiatives expand and new programming is developed.

For more information on Annie's Project go to: www.anniesproject.org.

Crane, Laurence, Gene Gantz, Steve Isaacs, Doug Jose, Rod Sharp, *Introduction to Risk Management-Understanding Agricultural Risks*. Second Edition, 2013. Extension Risk Management Education and Risk Management Agency.

Baquet, Alan, Ruth Hambleton, Doug Jose. *Introduction to Risk Management*, First Edition, 1997. Risk Management Agency.



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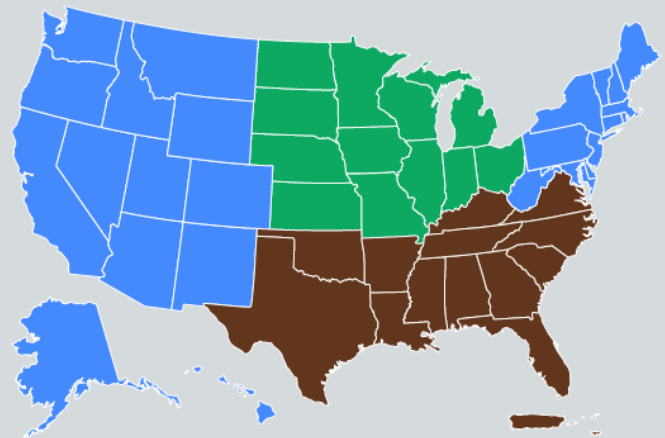
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“Educating America’s farmers and ranchers to manage the unique risks of producing food for the world’s table.”

Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) is delivered through four regional centers that provide grant funding and leadership within their regions.

Projects are producer-focused, results-based and encourage public-private partnerships. Funded projects must identify targeted results that will help producers manage risk and then describe how the project will measure those results.

Extension Risk Management Education has funded innovative programs that have generated tangible results for producers in every state. ERME is committed to funding results, providing transparent accountability, and encouraging collaboration. View the accomplishments of all funded projects on our website. <http://ExtensionRME.org>



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